



Northern Ireland
Assembly

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(Hansard)
and
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PROCEEDINGS**

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Table of Contents

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

Official Report (Hansard)

Assembly Sittings

Monday 20 February 2012

Assembly Business

Statutory Committee Membership	1
Public Petition: Drumcree College	1

Executive Committee Business

Budget Bill: Consideration Stage	2
Social Security (Loss of Benefit) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011.....	2

Private Members' Business

Emergency Life Support Skills	8
Welfare Reform	17

Oral Answers to Questions

Culture, Arts and Leisure	20
Education	24

Private Members' Business

Welfare Reform (<i>continued</i>)	29
---	----

Tuesday 21 February 2012

Executive Committee Business

Marine Bill: First Stage	41
Budget Bill: Further Consideration Stage	41
Official Statistics Order (Northern Ireland) 2012	41

Private Members' Business

Indigenous Fish Stocks.....	43
Organ Donation.....	55

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister	57
Agriculture and Rural Development	62

Private Members' Business

Organ Donation (<i>continued</i>)	66
---	----

Adjournment

Home Help Services: County Fermanagh.....	76
---	----

Monday 27 February 2012

Assembly Business

Resignation of Margaret Ritchie.....81

Matter of the Day

Oscars: 'The Shore'81

Ministerial Statements

North/South Ministerial Council: Waterways83

North/South Ministerial Council: Languages.....85

Assembly Business

Statutory Committee Membership89

Executive Committee Business

Budget Bill: Final Stage.....89

Private Members' Business

Decade of Centenaries98

Oral Answers to Questions

Employment and Learning.....101

Enterprise, Trade and Investment.....105

Private Members' Business

Decade of Centenaries (*continued*)110

Tuesday 28 February 2012

Assembly Business.....121

Executive Committee Business

Department of Justice121

Oral Answers to Questions

Environment.....133

Finance and Personnel137

Executive Committee Business

Rates (Amendment) Bill: Royal Assent141

Ministerial Statement

Article 31 Planning Applications and Decisions.....142

Private Members' Business

Carjacking.....148

Private Members' Business

Undeveloped Sites160

Adjournment

Children and Young People with Cancer: East Belfast171

Monday 5 March 2012

Matter of the Day

Golf: Rory McIlroy175

Ministerial Statement

North/South Ministerial Council: Agriculture177

Executive Committee Business

Marine Bill: Second Stage.....180

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister193

Health, Social Services and Public Safety.....196

Executive Committee Business

Marine Bill: Second Stage (<i>continued</i>)	201
--	-----

Executive Committee Business

High Hedges (Fee Transfer) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012	212
Public Bodies (Abolition of the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts) Order 2012	215

Tuesday 6 March 2012

Ministerial Statements

North/South Ministerial Council: Health and Food Safety	219
Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland and Employer Engagement Plan	222

Executive Committee Business

Labour Relations Agency Code of Practice on Time Off for Trade Union Duties and Activities	228
--	-----

Private Members' Business

Educational Assistance for Young People	230
---	-----

Oral Answers to Questions

Justice	236
Regional Development	240

Private Members' Business

Educational Assistance for Young People (<i>continued</i>)	244
Fairtrade Fortnight	251

Adjournment

Parkgate Quarry, County Antrim	259
--------------------------------------	-----

Committee Stages

Committee for Social Development

Pensions Bill [NIA 3/11-15]	CS 1
-----------------------------------	------

Written Answers

Friday 24 February 2012

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister	WA 1
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development	WA 7
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure	WA 20
Department of Education	WA 28
Department for Employment and Learning	WA 46
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment	WA 53
Department of the Environment	WA 68
Department of Finance and Personnel	WA 125
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety	WA 134
Department of Justice	WA 152
Department for Regional Development	WA 179
Department for Social Development	WA 192
Northern Ireland Assembly Commission	WA 210

Friday 2 March 2012

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister	WA 213
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development	WA 226
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure	WA 241

Department of Education	WA 248
Department for Employment and Learning.....	WA 256
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment	WA 268
Department of the Environment.....	WA 286
Department of Finance and Personnel	WA 311
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.....	WA 332
Department of Justice	WA 347
Department for Regional Development.....	WA 351
Department for Social Development	WA 364
Northern Ireland Assembly Commission	WA 386

Friday 9 March 2012

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister	WA 389
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development	WA 390
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure	WA 401
Department of Education	WA 413
Department for Employment and Learning.....	WA 428
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment	WA 432
Department of the Environment.....	WA 466
Department of Finance and Personnel	WA 498
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.....	WA 508
Department of Justice	WA 535
Department for Regional Development.....	WA 577
Department for Social Development	WA 602
Northern Ireland Assembly Commission	WA 620

Revised Written Answers

Enterprise, Trade and Investment.....	RWA 1
Environment.....	RWA 4
Health, Social Services and Public Safety.....	RWA 4
Regional Development.....	RWA 5
Social Development.....	RWA 7

Official Report (Hansard)

Members' Index	IDX 1
----------------------	-------

Journal of Proceedings

Minutes of Proceedings

Monday 20 February 2012.....	MOP 1
Tuesday 21 February 2012	MOP 9
Monday 27 February 2012.....	MOP 13
Tuesday 28 February 2012	MOP 17
Monday 5 March 2012	MOP 25
Tuesday 6 March 2012	MOP 29

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Minister for Social Development	Mr Nelson McCausland
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Minister of Justice.....	Mr David Ford

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

Official Report (Hansard)

Assembly Sitings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 20 February 2012

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Statutory Committee Membership

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

Resolved:

That Ms Paula Bradley replace Mr Gregory Campbell as a member of the Committee for Social Development; and that Mr Gregory Campbell replace Ms Paula Bradley as a member of the Committee for the Environment. – [Mr Weir]

Public Petition: Drumcree College

Mr Speaker: Mrs Dolores Kelly has sought leave to present a public petition in accordance with Standing Order 22, and the Member will have up to three minutes to speak about it.

Mrs D Kelly: This morning, Members may have noticed that a group of parents, pupils and community representatives from Portadown arrived at the Assembly to launch a petition to save Drumcree College. The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) informed the headmaster of the college just over a week ago, practically on the eve of mid-term recess, that the school is to close by June of this year.

The community, parents and teachers know that numbers have been falling, but not enough has been done to secure the future of Drumcree College. In the immediate Portadown area, on the Garvaghy Road, there are two primary schools: Ballyoran Primary School, which has an enrolment of 234 pupils, and St John the Baptist Primary School, which has 386. There are also St Mary's Primary School in Maghery, which has just over 80 pupils, and the Presentation Primary School, which has 140.

Between 2014 and 2015, it is anticipated that there will be an increase in the local population. It is most regrettable that CCMS has decided to close the school. Over recent years, CCMS and the Department of Education have allowed a situation to develop where pupils go to schools outside the catchment area and travel up to Armagh. Between six and eight buses travel outside the locality on any given weekday. That is not environmentally sustainable and goes against our aspiration of having local services available to local people.

Drumcree College also has an excellent learning support unit that is the envy of many. There is great anxiety among the pupils, the school staff and the teaching staff. Many Members will appreciate the difficult years that the people of Drumcree lived through. The news that they will lose their local college has been a bitter blow. Therefore, I present a petition on their behalf. Last week, they launched a website that asks people to support saving the school. As of last night, it had received 1,289 hits.

I hope that the Education Committee and the Minister, who has yet to publish his viability audit, will look again at the needs of the population in Portadown and the totality of education provision. Surely, there has to be a wider debate about shared education and having better resources at local level instead of bussing our children out of our towns and villages.

Mrs D Kelly moved forward and laid the petition on the Table.

Mr Speaker: I will forward the petition to the Minister of Education and send a copy to the Chairperson of the Committee.

Executive Committee Business

Budget Bill: Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: I call the Minister of Finance and Personnel to move the Consideration Stage of the Budget Bill.

Moved. — [Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]

Mr Speaker: No amendments have been tabled. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to group the seven clauses of the Bill for the Question on stand part, followed by the four schedules and the long title.

Clauses 1 to 7 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedules 1 to 4 agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Speaker: That concludes Consideration Stage of the Budget Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Social Security (Loss of Benefit) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011

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

That the Social Security (Loss of Benefit) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 be approved.

The regulations have their basis in the Welfare Reform Act (Northern Ireland) 2010, which was laid before the Assembly on 29 July 2010. Before I outline what they will achieve, I thank the Business Committee for tabling the regulations and the Committee for Social Development for giving them consideration during its recent meetings. I know the matter generated some discussion, and I hope to address some of the issues raised.

The regulations provide for the reduction or withdrawal of benefit for four weeks from people who have sought to undermine our benefit system by committing fraud. This is not a new concept. The Social Security Fraud Act (Northern Ireland) 2001 provides for a 13-week loss of benefit where an individual has been convicted of benefit fraud for a second time within a five-year period. The latest regulations build on the current arrangements by applying the loss of benefit for a first offence, but they limit the period of disqualification to four weeks rather than 13 weeks, as applies for a second offence. Introducing the new four-week loss of benefit for a first offence also brings the Social Security Agency into line with the procedures adopted in Great Britain, and it ensures that those caught committing fraud, whether in Northern Ireland or Great Britain, are treated in exactly the same way.

The policy of parity ensures that a person in Northern Ireland has the same benefit entitlements as his or her counterparts in England, Scotland or Wales. That facilitates free movement within the United Kingdom and ensures that individuals have access to the same benefits, regardless of location and irrespective of whether Northern Ireland can itself generate sufficient revenue to fund the benefits. It is acknowledged that parity has served Northern Ireland well and that there are risks associated with moving away from parity provision in social security.

I understand that there may be concerns about the impact of the regulations. Their purpose, alongside the full range of penalties available, is to deter those intent on committing fraud, and, without them, my Department would fail in its duty to safeguard public funds. However, I am acutely aware of the need to balance fraud prevention with ensuring that all members of society have adequate protection from hardship. That is why it is important to stress that the existing safeguards to prevent hardship under the current 13-week sanction will also apply to the new four-week provisions.

I will highlight those safeguards. First, many of the benefits currently available will not be subject to the four-week sanction at all. Those include statutory maternity, paternity and adoption pay, benefits paid to children, bereavement payments, retirement pension or benefits that cover the extra costs of disability. Of the benefits that qualify, the majority of those that are payable due to low income, such as state pension credit, income support, housing benefit and income-related employment and support allowance, are subject to reduction, not withdrawal.

The reduction will correspond to —

Mr F McCann: I will speak on this later, but I just wanted to say that, as a result of the reduction in benefits that people may get, others in the household will end up having to make a fresh claim. It could take three or four weeks for that to come through without any benefits being received.

Mr McCausland: If the Member is patient, he will get the information that he may seek.

The reduction — it is not a withdrawal — will correspond to 40% of the single person's allowance, which is currently £67·50, in the first instance. That is mitigated further to a 20% reduction in circumstances where the customer or other member of the family is seriously ill or pregnant.

The final important point to make is that, of the remaining benefits that may be withdrawn, such as jobseeker's allowance, contributory employment and support allowance and incapacity benefit, anyone is entitled to seek financial assistance through hardship rates. In a number of ways, therefore, any potential difficulties are mitigated.

12.15 pm

Going back to the core intention of introducing the regulations, I make it absolutely clear that the powers are solely about dealing with fraud. This is not about penalising anyone who makes an honest mistake. Perhaps I should explain precisely what I mean by fraud. Benefit fraud requires the deliberate and intentional act of claiming money to which there is no entitlement. I would hope that everyone in the House would join me in saying that fraud is unacceptable. Common examples are those who work yet claim jobseeker's allowance for being out of work; those declaring limited means to meet the daily costs of living yet retaining large accumulations of savings; or those who claim assistance to meet the cost of living on their own yet have a partner living with them. Those three examples serve to show clearly that this is not something where you have an accidental or honest mistake. If someone is in work and is claiming jobseeker's allowance, they know that they are in work. If they have money in the bank, they will know it. If they are living with someone else, yet claiming to live on their own, they will know it. Those are not cases of an honest mistake. Without firm and visible deterrent action and measures such as the regulations before the House today, those intent on committing fraud would continue to make false claims.

I also take the opportunity to highlight the significant progress made by the agency over recent years, with fraud well down from over £60 million in 2002 to £20 million in 2010. There has been a reduction, which is welcome, but there is more work to be done. However, within the context of that progress, I cannot and will not be complacent. I seek to introduce the regulations to ensure that people are deterred from criminal behaviour. Without that deterrence and without the efforts my Department puts into tackling fraud, the benefit system, which is vital to the 99·9% of customers who are honest and rightfully in receipt of much needed help, would be completely undermined.

This is not about mistakes. Although I have stressed precisely what I mean by fraud, I add further clarity: fraud means that this is not about mistakes. I understand entirely the concerns raised at the time the regulations were launched

in September that innocent people might face a sanction for having misunderstood or made a mistake. Let me address that point clearly and absolutely: only those who accept an administrative penalty or admit to having committed fraud or those who are found guilty by a court of having committed fraud will face a fraud sanction. Those who have made a genuine mistake have nothing to fear from the regulations. I stress again that there is a clear distinction to be made: only those who deliberately make false claims to benefit will ever have any cause to be concerned over these or any other of the available fraud sanctions.

The existing loss of benefit provision impacts only on the small number of people who commit benefit fraud twice and are convicted of the offence in court. It has no impact on the larger number of people who commit benefit fraud once or on those who have committed fraud but are dealt with outside the court process. This four-week benefit sanction applies to all those who receive administrative penalties and formal cautions as well as those who are convicted of benefit fraud through the courts.

Although there is the potential for around 1,000 cases a year to be affected, it is again important to place that in context. The agency has over 650,000 benefit customers, of whom around 1,000 are sanctioned for fraud each year. That represents just 0·2% of the agency's customer base. The other key message is, of course, that ultimately my goal is that no one commits fraud. Through the measure today, alongside our existing range of sanctions, the aim is to deter people from committing fraud rather than to catch them.

We must remember that benefit fraud is theft of taxpayers' money, and so there has never been a more important time to ensure that there are effective sanctions in place to deter and deal with those who choose to deliberately abuse the benefits system. I believe that the new sanction will strengthen the measures that we have in place already and provide a further, much more effective, deterrent to people who are considering abusing the system that is there to support those in need.

I reiterate the key safeguard: any person who believes that they are not guilty of having committed fraud is entitled to all the defences and protections afforded by the criminal justice system. As with any case in which criminality is suspected, it is, ultimately, for the court to decide guilt where wrongdoing is suspected, not for my Department. In the event of guilt having been decided and if the benefit involved is subject to the regulations, the courts will, of course, be free to take into account in sentencing the fact that a person found guilty will face loss of benefit.

I believe that it is important that we get the balance right between protecting wider society from the fraudulent and wasteful use of taxpayers' money and ensuring that those who are subject to sanction do not, at the same time, face undue hardship. I believe that the regulations strike the right balance. They are there to protect society. However, ultimately, I have no desire to see the regulations needing to be applied to any customer. The aim is simple: to deter criminality, to remove the temptation to commit fraud and, in doing so, to ensure that the benefits system maintains its integrity and security and serves those who are rightfully entitled to assistance.

Mr A Maskey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I do not intend to say that much about this because some of my party colleagues will refer to the motion in more detail. I thank the Minister for tabling the motion and speaking to it. I will make a number of points on behalf of the Committee.

The Committee voted in support of the motion from the Minister and the Department, but I would like to set that in some context. My party, myself included, voted against the provisions. I want to place it on record in the House that the Committee took quite a long time — a number of months — to deliberate on the amendment to the regulations. Primarily, that was on the simple principle of the injustice of the amendment to the existing regulations. Quite simply, it was the view of all members of the Committee that this represents double jeopardy. As all members have the right to do, some took the view that this is primarily a parity issue and, therefore, could not vote against it.

All members of the Committee were resolute in their support for the Department's efforts to root out any fraud in the benefits system. That goes without saying, but I repeat it this morning on behalf of all members of the Committee. I just want to set the record straight that the Committee's deliberation on this took a number of meetings. We left the issue to one side while other matters were discussed in the House, not least Housing Executive accommodation and the housing benefit cost. The Committee then returned to the issue, with, I have to say, great difficulty. Even the members who voted for the amendment were quite firm in feeling that this is an unjust amendment to the regulations. If a person in receipt of benefit is found guilty of that fraud, they will have to pay the money back. That is as it should be, but they will then face prosecution. Therein lies the lack of justice. Unlike someone who commits another crime, they will have their benefits impacted upon. To most people, that seems inherently unfair. It is only if you are in receipt of benefit and commit the crime of fraud that you have a sanction imposed on you by the courts and then have further sanctions imposed. Even in the circumstances prescribed by the Minister, further sanctions will be imposed. My party colleagues felt, as did all other Committee members, that that was grossly unfair.

I will now depart, Mr Speaker, from speaking as Chairperson of the Committee and speak as a party representative about the intention of the amendment. My view and that of my party colleagues is that people may have been overpaid in error by departmental officials. It must be stated that the Department's own figures, not mine, show that, when it comes to spend, fraud is infinitesimal when compared with departmental error.

The Department could overpay a claimant for a period and then discover the overpayment. The claimant would be called in and asked whether he or she received that payment in the wrong. Often, when such a payment is drawn to a claimant's attention, it is routinely shown to have been a simple oversight. Often, the claimant will accept that they received the payment in the wrong and they must repay the money overpaid. That leads them into the grey area of prosecution where they could also face the courts. Despite the fact that the level of departmental error is grossly greater than that of fraud, no official will face sanctions for putting someone in that situation, someone who is at subsistence level already by virtue of the very fact that they

are in receipt of benefits of whatever description. No official will face any sanction whatever. My party believes that this is a matter of simple, basic unfairness.

The nub of the issue is to stop fraud and save the Department money. That is as it should be. However, there are tactical matters to be considered. If it is drawn to a claimant's attention that they have been overpaid, that person will not readily accept that that is the case and repay the money, if in doing so he or she will also face the courts. The claimant will say, "Sorry, just take me to court". Then, the Department's difficulty will be to mount a successful prosecution. In many cases, that will be almost impossible because the courts will take a view on the merits of each individual case. The prosecution service will have to work out whether it is worthwhile to take each case to court. Therefore, this amendment will not necessarily be successful in trying to save the Department money.

As I said, my party believes that this is a matter of the basic principle of justice. Mickey Brady and colleagues will speak further on that. It is double jeopardy. If a person falls foul of that or even commits fraud, they should either pay the money back through the benefits system or face the courts. It really should not be both. When anyone else commits any other type of crime, they do not face double jeopardy.

Mr Campbell: The Chair of the Committee for Social Development outlined the issue on which the Committee dwelt at considerable length. I think that everybody in the Committee can see the difficulties that are enshrined in the regulations. I want to say a few words and come to the nub of the issue briefly. Even though I know that the debate is open-ended, I do not plan to speak open-endedly.

In his opening remarks, the Minister made the pertinent point that just 10 years ago fraud cost the Department — that means you and I, Mr Speaker, and every taxpayer in the country — £60 million each year. Over a 10-year period, that would be over half a billion pounds on fraud. However, that figure has been coming down gradually, which is right and proper. It is now approximately £20 million. That is still an excessive amount, and everyone supports the crackdown on fraud.

I also welcome the Minister's assurances on errors and mistakes by claimants. It is important that claimants who complete forms, either in conjunction with those who give them assistance or on their own, understand that mistakes can and do occur and that they will not be penalised and prosecuted if they make an honest mistake. That is good. However, the points are relevant with regard to people who are in receipt of benefit. We all know that, whether people regard benefits as being generous or less than generous, if they are easily accessible and are regarded by some as being better than not having them, there will be fraud. The problem is how we deal with that fraud.

12.30 pm

The nub of the issue is parity; that is at the bottom of this. We can all discuss the problems that individuals will be faced with and analyse and discuss individual cases night and day. However, the bottom line — I hope that the Minister will refer to this at the end of the debate — is what the cost would be to this community and to Northern Ireland taxpayers if we were to break from parity. Some might ask what the benefit of parity is: it is £8,000 million per annum. Unfortunately, we face this problem on many occasions

when dealing with welfare benefit reform. We must ask what the cost will be to our community if we were to decide, for whatever reason, to depart from parity to try to protect those affected, be they numerous or quite small in number or affected by a small or large amount. That is the unfortunate catch-22 situation that we are in. We must grasp that and decide how much we would need to find, from whatever Department or resource, to make up for that breach of parity. We must also understand who will suffer as a result. That is the catch-22 question that we never hear answered. Unfortunately, many of us will have to cast our vote on that basis today.

Mr Copeland: I speak as my party's spokesman from the Committee for Social Development. I echo the words of Mr Campbell and recognise the warnings that he gave.

The word "fraud" is generally used in conjunction with the word "error" and an examination of the two throws up a curious statistic, which is that the cost of departmental and customer error exceeds the cost of fraud. Although I fully support and agree with the notion that fraud must be prevented, detected and penalised, I do not think that that alone is an adequate approach to the problem before us.

No one is against the Department's efforts to tackle benefit fraud. It is a despicable crime, because it takes advantage of a system that was designed to protect the vulnerable, the needy, the disabled and the elderly, and it diverts funds from those who truly need them. However, it is fair to say and recognise that the proposals gave rise to and promoted a good deal of discussion in the Committee. It is quite right that that was the case, because it is the Committee's job to scrutinise legislation before it comes to the House.

The concerns of the Committee, such as they were, centred on several particular areas. One of those was double jeopardy and the notion that claimants could be prosecuted twice. That seems wrong. They could be prosecuted by the courts, which could result in a fine and by the Department in the form of benefit sanctions. Some could be forgiven for saying that that is not quite fair. Secondly, claimants found not guilty of benefit fraud in court could still face benefit sanctions, because the three tests applied by the Public Prosecution Service differ from those applied by the Department. That could give rise to people being adjudicated as guilty by one system and not guilty by another. We also have the impact of the decisions when they are made and against whom they are made, particularly, as is envisaged, if the individual concerned is the head of a household. Delays in benefit payments that may arise from new and fresh claims being submitted could result in a disproportionate level of disadvantage and need being foisted on innocent parties.

However, as Mr Campbell said, all of that pales into insignificance when compared with any action that could be construed as a breach of parity. A person in Northern Ireland is subject to the same rules and conditions of entitlement as a person in Great Britain. According to the Minister, the Department for Work and Pensions and Mr Campbell — I have no reason to doubt any of those opinions — a move away from parity could be seen as a breach of parity and that would be irresponsible.

Mr Durkan: I agree that fraud is unacceptable, as will, I am sure, or I certainly hope, all Members who speak. As Mr

Copeland outlined, it is far from a victimless crime. However, we must also be aware of just how minor a problem benefit fraud is in Northern Ireland in the greater scheme of things. Less than 0.4% of benefit expenditure is lost to fraud. We do not want to create a sledgehammer with which to crack that nut. We cannot support the creation of a double penalty for people, regardless of how we view their offence.

As mentioned by Members who spoke previously, this penalty can, despite the Minister's reassurances, cause undue and unfair hardship to families, not just individuals. We would rather see the coalition Government in London display the same zeal in attempts to maximise benefit uptake, for example, or, indeed, to eradicate departmental error, which other Members have mentioned.

This legislation does not merely deter or punish fraud. It also serves to demonise other benefit claimants in the eyes of others, creating the impression that fraud is much more prevalent than it actually is. With the successful and significant reduction in fraud over recent years, as Mr Campbell told us, one wonders whether there is any point or need for this new legislation. The focus of the coalition Government on targeting those on benefits rather than individuals and companies that continue to evade tax says much about their priorities. Those are not priorities we share.

Mrs Cochrane: I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak on the proposed regulations. First, I want to say that loss of benefit regulations are already in place. The Social Security (Loss of Benefit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2002 and the Social Security Fraud Act (Northern Ireland) 2001 allow for benefits to be withdrawn or reduced for 13 weeks where a person is convicted of benefit fraud twice and the second offence was committed within five years of the date of the previous conviction.

It is interesting to note that the existing policy impacts on only a very small number of people. The 13 claimants who were convicted in 2010-11 were all repeat offenders who had been convicted of a benefit offence more than once within five years. The new regulations will include those who have been convicted of benefit fraud for the first time. The introduction of benefit sanctions such as that will reinforce the message that abuse of the system will not be tolerated, and the small number of people who wilfully commit fraud will lose their right to receive the same level of support as the vast majority of those who do not abuse the system, and I agree with that principle.

As far as I am aware, certain groups have been protected under the sanctions, and the Minister has already highlighted some of them. The penalty will not affect bereavement payments, retirement pensions, payments made for children or those that cover the extra costs of disability. Despite those reassurances, members of the Committee raised concerns about the potential impact of the changes, and we spent many weeks deliberating on them. However, as has already been said, the impact of a breach of parity must be considered seriously.

Generally, Northern Ireland has benefited from parity, as all rates of benefit and entitlement here are on a par with anyone in the same position in England, Scotland or Wales, irrespective of whether Northern Ireland can generate sufficient revenue to fund the benefits that are distributed here. As with other parts of the UK, funding for

social security benefits in Northern Ireland is in line with the entitlement of claimants here. That money is provided separately, outside the block grant, and is predicated on parity being maintained. Any costs arising, were we to breach parity, would have to be made up from the block grant by the Executive.

As a result, it is crucial that we remember that any break in parity could have significant financial implications and trigger a review of the current advantageous funding arrangements that we have. Therefore, I support the regulations.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. A lot of the arguments have been rehearsed already, but there is a fundamental issue here. Everyone should be equal under the law, but it is clear that people who are convicted of social security fraud are not equal because they are also sanctioned. Members have talked about a double whammy. In fact, if you look at it logically, you will see that it is probably a treble whammy. You are convicted, you may be incarcerated or fined, and then you lose your benefits. How are you supposed to pay your fine? If you cannot pay your fine, you will be in further trouble. It works like that.

In relation to what Mr Durkan and Mr Copeland said, it needs to be borne in mind that sanctions are not victimless either. I say at the outset that we do not condone benefit fraud. I worked in an advice centre for 30 years, and benefit fraud happened. I do not necessarily agree that the sanctions will act as a deterrent to people who commit benefit fraud. Certain individuals think that they will never get caught. Therefore, I am not sure about the efficacy of the sanctions. What they will do is affect families. The Minister talks about hardship payments. However, those are limited and at the discretion of the local office and, in many cases, decision-makers who are not that discretionary. That is also an issue that needs to be addressed.

There are many issues around benefit fraud and sanctions, but it is unfair how people will be affected. Individuals who go out and commit benefit fraud do it knowingly and take a calculated risk about whether they will be caught, but their families do not. In many cases that I have come across over the years, the families were simply not aware of what was happening and did not benefit from the extra money that was received. That also needs to be borne in mind. Mr Campbell talked about parity and catch-22. I always find that people who use that cliché do not want to go into the detail and explain exactly what it means. Parity is a different issue that needs to be discussed in greater detail. In this case, we are talking about inequality in the law.

As much effort should be put into ensuring that people get the benefit to which they are entitled. Pension credit, for example, is under-claimed by approximately £1.9 million per week. That money does not go back into the economy here; it goes back to the British Treasury. The same effort should be put into ensuring that people get the money that they are entitled to. I accept that there are people who will always commit benefit fraud. They should not. It is wrong, and it should not be condoned. Those people deserve to be punished, not the other people who are victims of the fraud carried out by the family member or whoever. That needs to be remembered.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I had written something out, but my two colleagues have

said everything that I was going to say. It is always difficult to speak last. We have been fairly consistent in the House in arguing against sanctions. About 18 months ago, we brought amendments to another aspect of the sanctions in the Bill. We did that because we believe that it is wrong to charge and sentence people twice for the same crime.

As my colleagues and everybody else have said, fraud is wrong. Every day, the Department for Social Development's (DSD) website contains evidence of people who have been brought in front of the courts and sentenced for doing the double, as it is called. They may then go on to be sanctioned. The vast majority of those who are caught doing the double are women on low pay, often in cleaning jobs. They are caught either because someone lifts the phone on them or because the DSD goes into cleaning firms every number of months, clears out their files and brings charges. The injustice is not only that people will be sanctioned twice but that, the next day, the employers will have people working on the same jobs without any fear of prosecution or sanction. They do not fear being charged because there is nothing there to do it, which is a big injustice.

The fact is that people who do the double and are then arrested sometimes have to pay back considerable amounts of money. Some have to go to prison, although that is fairly rare. However, when they get out, they will face another sanction.

12.45 pm

I know what the Minister is saying. He is saying that there are built-in provisions that will allow people to overcome the loss of benefit, be it through a crisis loan or another benefit. However, under such circumstances, it is not that easy to go into a social security office and get a crisis loan request dealt with. By and large, people will have to make fresh claims, which could take weeks to process; so, the family of the person doing the double will be penalised along with that person. However, people who get a number of years in jail for a serious offence can walk into a benefits office upon their release, explain that they are only out of prison and say that they want to make a fresh claim. They face no obstacle in doing that, and that is the injustice.

Most people who do the double, and I am not saying that that is right, do so as a consequence of their financial circumstances at the time. Members need to take on board the type of people we are dealing with: it is usually those who are finding it difficult to live on subsistence level benefits. I think that sanctions are wrong and that this process will condemn people to being sentenced twice. Therefore, I therefore ask Members to vote against the regulations.

Mr McCausland: Members made quite a number of points, and I thank them for their contributions to the discussion on the regulations. I will pick up on those points, although not in the order in which they were raised because some of them were touched on by a number of different Members.

One of the points was that there is too much focus on fraud and not enough on error. I recognise that fraud is not the only contributor to incorrect benefit. Staff accuracy continues to be placed under significant scrutiny. However, the fact is that the overall level of financial accuracy across the benefits system is 99.2%. We recognise, therefore, that staff error accounts for only 0.8% of expenditure. A close watch is kept on fraud and error. The Social Security Agency operates significant governance and control procedures to

drive up staff performance. That has been successful in that staff error has fallen from more than 2% in 2002-03 to 0.8% in 2010. So, there is ongoing and successful work in driving down error. Alongside that, we need ongoing work to drive down fraud. I think that it was Alex Maskey who suggested that there was some great disparity between error and fraud. In fact, the figures are as follows: error 0.8%; and fraud 0.5%. In other words, fraud is a clear and substantial issue. A lot has been done to reduce that very significantly, but more needs to be done.

Gregory Campbell pointed out that there would be parity implications if the regulations do not proceed. I think that it was Mickey Brady who said that we need to look more at the issue of parity, discuss what it means and so on. The fact is that it is clear what it means. It ensures that a person in Northern Ireland has the same benefit entitlements and rates of benefit as his or her counterparts in other parts of the United Kingdom, be it in England, Scotland or Wales. That has many benefits for people in Northern Ireland. I just do not understand the issue as regards analysing that.

It seems to me to be clear that it is a straightforward issue. However, the Member wants to explore it, and I am sure that it will be explored on other occasions. It is not, however, something —

Mr Brady: Will the Minister give way?

Mr McCausland: Yes.

Mr Brady: Parity is not all about money. Other aspects of parity need to be discussed, including administration and all sorts of other issues that are involved in parity.

Mr McCausland: A variety of issues relate to parity, including legislation, regulations and operations, but the basic principle is very clear to us.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Minister for giving way. As I said in my speech, the important issue of parity keeps coming up. In Committee, the vote was carried by only five votes to four, so if one member had voted the other way, we could have been talking not only about the possibility of the costs of parity but about the reality of it. If that had been the case or were to be the case in the future, can the Minister outline whether, if the Department for Work and Pensions were to determine that to be a breach of parity that would come to £100 million, £200 million or whatever cost, he, the Executive and all of us would be obliged to find the shortfall?

Mr McCausland: I thank the Member for his intervention, and he has made the implications of breaking parity absolutely clear. It is a luxury that Northern Ireland cannot afford.

I picked up on Mark Durkan's use of the words "undue and unfair". A sanctions system is already in place, and I ask him to reflect on whether that system is undue and unfair. The logic of his position is that he would throw out all sanctions, even the current sanction, which has been successful as a measure in driving down the level of fraud. He also spoke about demonising other people. No one is demonised. If people carry out criminal offences — fraud is a criminal offence — it is right and proper that those individuals should be sanctioned for so doing. I urge him to reflect on the implications of what he has said, and I make that point more widely, because a lot of comments were made during the discussion, and if Members read

the Hansard report of the debate and reflect on what they have said, they might realise that they open up some very dangerous grounds by the direction in which they were going.

Mickey Brady said that sanctions are not victimless and that sanctions do not work. Sanctions do work. When you look at the number of people who are identified as carrying out a first offence and the number who are identified as carrying out a second offence, you will see quite clearly that there is a substantial reduction. The two strikes policy impacts on only a very small number of claimants. During 2010-11, it impacted on 13 people, whereas a much larger number of people carried out a first offence. That brings me on to the question of numbers. In 2010-11, 1,128 sanctions were imposed. By the time of the second strike, the number reduced to 13. That shows clearly that, when people see the potential to lose their benefit for 13 weeks, it brings a bit of reality and recognition to the situation. Although, potentially, every one of the 1,128 people could have attracted the loss of benefit provisions, only those who remain in receipt of a sanctionable benefit or reclaim within the disqualification period will be sanctioned. The issue of numbers is important to set the scale of the problem, and if we could get to the point at which 1,000 fewer people were committing fraud, we would be in a better place than we are now.

The issue has been set out very clearly. We have been through a wide range of issues. I did not really hear that many arguments of substance. The difficulty for some people is a mindset that means that they cannot quite bring themselves to the position of supporting this.

However, it is important for this Assembly and this country that we get to the right place, because, as Gregory Campbell pointed out and as we discussed, there are significant implications if we do not go down this road. If people want to burden the Northern Ireland exchequer with whatever number of millions of pounds it is, so be it. However, will we take that out of health or out of education? That is the implication of going down the road of not following parity with the regulations. Therefore, I urge the House to view the regulations as a vital part of the measures that are needed to help deter anyone who is intent on undermining the benefits system, which is vital to the needs and well-being of so many in our society.

I just noticed that I did not respond to the point about there being too much focus on fraud and not enough on benefit uptake. We are doing much more this year than ever before and more than was done under any previous Minister to encourage benefit uptake, with television campaigns, an outreach programme, the innovation fund and targeted exercises aimed at individual groups of people. The benefit uptake programme, which has been in place since 2005, has been strengthened this year, and, so far, it has resulted in over £37 million in additional benefits and arrears being paid to customers across Northern Ireland. We are dealing with error, uptake and fraud, and we are bound by the principle of parity. I urge Members to consider carefully the implications of what they have said, to reflect on it and to act in a responsible way by supporting the regulations. I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Social Security (Loss of Benefit) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 be approved.

Private Members' Business

Emergency Life Support Skills

Mr Speaker: The next item of business is a cross-party motion on emergency life support skills. The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Weir: I beg to move

That this Assembly is concerned that heart and circulatory disease remains Northern Ireland's biggest killer; notes that, for every minute that passes after a cardiac arrest without defibrillation, the chance of survival is reduced by around 10% but that immediate cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) can improve the chances of survival by up to a factor of three; further notes that, last year, more than 30,000 people were trained in emergency life support skills (ELS), including CPR, by the British Heart Foundation's (BHF) Heartstart programme; supports BHF's campaign to ensure that all schools, communities, and workplaces, provide ELS training; and calls on the Executive, the health and social care trusts and the education bodies to work together to provide the necessary investment to deliver this training to every school, community and workplace.

I welcome the opportunity to move the motion. As you indicated, Mr Speaker, this is a cross-party motion that bears the names of all five of the major parties. That shows the unity of purpose on the issue. Today is an opportunity to highlight the issue, provide a degree of education for people and, hopefully, see some action. If you look at the motion, you will see that it is not simply a challenge to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS), although I understand that the Minister will respond to the debate. It is not even simply a challenge to the whole Executive but is, indeed, a wider challenge to society as a whole, including schools, workplaces, community and voluntary groups and to all of us as individuals.

I want to highlight the significance of the motion. At the outset, I thank all those parties that have backed the motion here and in the Business Committee. A number of parties were willing to move motions further down the slot and take a later time for them to facilitate today's debate.

It is also a motion with a tone that resonates throughout various parts of the British Isles. It is something that is being debated at Westminster and is to be debated in other devolved institutions. It is something that has been pushed by the British Heart Foundation and by the Irish Heart Foundation in the Irish Republic.

1.00 pm

Emergency life skills, as I will explain later, go beyond CPR and keeping those who have heart attacks alive. There are other considerations to be borne in mind. However, it is undoubtedly the case that the main focus has been on those suffering heart attacks. It is important at the start of the debate to acknowledge that, over the years, a considerable amount of work has been done that has

benefited people with heart disease or who have had heart attacks. Consequently, anybody looking at the level of mortality rates will see that, for example, nearly 5,000 people died of heart disease in 1980, and that we have got that number down to a little bit over 2,000. It has more than halved in 30 years, which is to be welcomed. However, it is also undoubtedly the case that there is more to be done.

There are many statistics around the impact of heart disease, and I suspect that the debate may be awash with statistics. More than 60,000 people in Northern Ireland have had a heart attack at some stage. I think there are 97,000 who are acknowledged to have some form of angina and, indeed, there are probably many with undiagnosed problems. I suspect that, despite the fall in the statistics — we should also remember that we are dealing with the second biggest killer in Northern Ireland, second only to cancer — it is something that is of resonance to virtually every family in Northern Ireland. I suspect that there is no one in the Chamber who does not have either a relative or friend who has suffered through angina or has suffered a heart attack. I suspect that there are some in the Chamber who have lost a loved one to a heart attack. While there are a number of ways in which we can tackle the problems of heart attacks — I will be coming on to those — the key element of the focus is on making that difference by way of early intervention.

Clearly, swift action can be taken within hospitals for those who suffer heart attacks, but we have to acknowledge that all the statistics suggest that the vast majority of heart attacks happen outside of hospitals. According to research, in Northern Ireland, about 84% of heart attacks happen in the home, 9% happen in a public place and about another 8% happen in care institutions. The bottom line is that, without CPR, for every minute following sudden cardiac arrest, unless there is intervention, the chance of survival reduces by around 7% to 10% per minute. Overall, bystander CPR increases survival rate by two to three times compared with no bystander CPR. It is undoubtedly the case that that early intervention is crucial. Indeed, it forms a vital link of what the British Heart Foundation has called the chain of survival. That has four elements to it: early recognition and call for help; early CPR; early defibrillation; and post-resuscitation care.

It is also the case that the other factor that can reduce the number of deaths from heart attacks is preventing them happening in the first place. I know that the Minister has been very proactive on that front. There is a wider challenge to society around lifestyle choices and prevention. In looking at that chain of survival, it is clear that there is work that needs to be done on a range of those elements. For example, in terms of early recognition, a survey was carried out in the north Down and Ards area that indicated that 30% of heart patients failed to call 999 and that about 30% of those with heart attack-like symptoms waited for more than 12 hours before calling for help. It also revealed that just 19% of people admitted to the coronary care unit with chest pain had called 999. Therefore, work needs to be done around that.

Northern Ireland has been at the very centre of the issue around early defibrillation for many years, which is one of the reasons why it is particularly important that we are debating it in Northern Ireland. I am sure that the Minister will know, as the gentleman came from his constituency, that

Northern Ireland made a vital contribution to defibrillation, particularly through the late Professor Frank Pantridge, who invented the mobile defibrillator.

There is ongoing work on post-resuscitation care to ensure that people are brought to the right hospital and that they receive the right treatment when they are there. The focus is on the early use of CPR to buy time; that is where the focus needs to lie and is where the campaign has been largely focused.

The British Heart Foundation has done good work: last year, 30,000 people were trained in emergency life support skills. Although we have focused on CPR, emergency life support skills are also about knowledge of first aid in how to assess an unconscious patient, deal with choking and with serious bleeding. There are many examples of intervention by a trained person saving a life, but there is much more to be done.

Despite ongoing training, St John Ambulance estimates that about 150,000 people die unnecessarily each year across the UK when there could have been early intervention by way of first aid. That is where we have a part to play. As indicated, around 30,000 people were trained in emergency life support skills last year, and, overall, about 160,000 people have been trained in the last number of years. However, we can go further.

It is not simply a matter of what action the Health Department takes and what action is taken by the Executive as a whole; we have to look at a range of issues. For example, although some health trusts have embraced the idea, support for emergency life skills has not been uniform throughout Northern Ireland. We need to tackle that.

Similarly, much of the focus of training should be on the young and those in school. A number of schools have embraced the early life skills programme, and some of the written answers that I have received to questions indicate that there is room in the curriculum for that; but it has not been taken up by every school. Although work can be done at a central level, there is a major challenge in schools in particular, but also in workplaces and voluntary organisations, to embrace emergency life support skills. The opportunity is there to be taken.

For those of us who have seen a loved one suffer a heart attack and not known what to do or, in the most painful situation, lost a loved one to a heart attack, the Assembly must give a clear message that that knowledge must be spread. I would like to see an initiative not in the motion: if all 108 MLAs were trained, we could set a very good example to society.

I hope that the whole House can embrace the motion, as it is literally a matter of life and death. Let us work hard to improve survival rates that affect the cost of our healthcare, because treating those who have suffered a heart attack creates a great deal of financial strain on the system, but also that we can see more people —

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

Mr Weir: We can reduce further the mortality rate by embracing this, and we can make a positive contribution to people's lives and families across Northern Ireland.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I would like to record apologies from Michelle Gildernew for not

being here; as people are aware, she has broken her foot. She is a signatory to the motion, which Sinn Féin supports.

The problem with all-party motions is that everybody will say the same thing.

Mr McCarthy: It is the way you say it.

Ms S Ramsey: I do not think that there will be any debate as such; however, that should not take away from the fact that this is a very important issue. I am keen to hear what the Minister says because I know that he has an interest in it. I welcome Peter Weir's opening comments about preventative measures; they are important as well.

Mickey and I were just talking. We are supposed to be political leaders — supposed to be — but how many people in this Chamber know life-saving skills or CPR? We need to ensure that we are showing that political leadership in our communities. I know that some people in this Building are trained in first aid, and I give credit where credit is due, but, God forbid, if somebody were to suffer the symptoms of a heart attack, I could not help them. I think that I know everything, but I do not, and CPR is one of those things that I do not know. So it is important that we show that political leadership.

We talk about the Health Service and the invest-to-save strategy in a political context. This is a crucial invest-to-save issue. We need to ensure that we are in there at ground level in whatever community. We need to talk about preventative measures, and we need to ensure that people have the proper training. If we do that, we will save money further down the line, but, most importantly, we will save people. We will save our fathers, our brothers, our mothers, our sisters and our community representatives. That is the important thing about investing to save.

In opening the debate, Peter Weir went through a lot of statistics. When we talk about ensuring that we have life-saving skills and the relevant machinery in our communities, it is important that we look at the rural aspect of that. Having a lot of that information in urban settings is very good, but we need to look at how it fits in with some of our communities that are situated in isolated areas.

We are well aware that heart disease is probably the biggest killer, if you take into account the other diseases associated with it. Statistics show that the majority of deaths from heart disease take place in socially disadvantaged areas, so we need to get in there.

Following recent high-profile deaths over the last number of years, the community and voluntary sector and sporting organisations have worked to ensure that defibrillators are available, so I give credit where credit is due. However, we need to look at the chances of survival around having CPR training. Peter said that the chances of survival following cardiac arrest are reduced by 7% to 10% for every minute that people are without CPR. That is important, and the Heartstart programme is an effective and cost-effective way to ensure that we build all those resources in our community.

If 1,000 teachers are trained, it will have an impact on the pupils who they are in daily contact with, and it can generate momentum in our communities. Young people have been involved in some of the best campaigns, and they constantly chirp away about it when they go home. For instance, a lot of

the anti-smoking campaigns gathered momentum because young people were taught about it in school, and they went home and constantly chirped and nagged, and that had a big impact on family life. So it is important that they take ownership of a lot of these campaigns.

We support the motion. It is an all-party motion, and nobody in this House could oppose it. That shows the collective responsibility that we have when we put our heads together and work together as political parties.

Mr Nesbitt: I very much welcome the opportunity to speak on this matter. It is an issue that is receiving unanimous support. Emergency life support skills should definitely be taught to all young people across Northern Ireland. It would equip them with the vital yet straightforward skills that are necessary to keep people alive.

Mr Speaker, 12 years ago, I went with three friends for a weekend break to the south of Spain, and it is a matter of huge regret for the rest of my life that only three of us came back alive. Leonard died in an incident that was never properly explained. It may have been a heart attack or some other cause, but he was discovered struggling in the port of Puerto Banus. He would most certainly have drowned if somebody with life skills had not presented and volunteered to try to rescue him.

They did their best. They were able to get him, still alive, to hospital, but, unfortunately, he passed on within 24 hours. I wish to put on record my gratitude to the man who got him out of the water, because, although we were in Spain, the man happened to be from Bangor in County Down. I do not know how many Members have experience of the impact of life-saving skills or the devastating impact of the lack of them, but I, for one, have had that experience, and I am more than happy to support the motion on the back of that.

1.15 pm

I remember being taught some basic skills at school. As it was an all boys' school, there was much interest in how we would manage the mouth-to-mouth class. However, we managed to achieve it without any interpersonal contact, or, at least, as far as I could see. I wonder whether Mr Weir has any thoughts on how the 108 MLAs might circumnavigate that issue.

This sort of life skill is perfect for the classroom and for the revised curriculum.

Mr Weir: As somebody who has done first-aid training, I can say that the key element of CPR is, as indicated by the advert, less the mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and more restarting the heart. At present, that is highlighted by Vinnie Jones. I am sure that we could manage to avoid all 108 Members having mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, certainly with each other. That would certainly be a step forward.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Member for his intervention and the reassurance contained therein.

The vast majority of heart attacks occur outside hospital. If we are to find a way to further improve survival rates, the people of Northern Ireland must at least be aware of how to carry out CPR. No one particularly likes the thought of young people having to be taught how to physically position a person after he or she have collapsed. However,

in many situations, doing something as simple as putting the body into the recovery position can have life-changing consequences.

I mentioned that life skills are perfect for the revised curriculum. I understand that the British Heart Foundation claims that around half of Northern Ireland's schools have had the emergency life support training, but the cost comes in at around £1,000 to £2,000 for each of those 537 schools. Four employees of the foundation have been providing training in the northern and western areas since 2008, but they are no longer in the position to keep that full funding in place. It is a matter of regret that they will end the programme in six weeks' time. The trainer from the British Heart Foundation normally tutors three or more teachers in each school and provides them with a training pack, containing a mannequin and all the other necessary resources, for about 40 pupils.

The revised curriculum allows areas for operation with regard to emergency life support skills. At primary level, I believe that the area would be personal development and mutual understanding, and, at post-primary level, it would be learning for life and work. The learning for life and work section of the revised curriculum originally stated that pupils would have to demonstrate their awareness of those skills. However, that was amended so that they were required to have only an awareness. Therefore they are required to have an awareness, rather than to be able to demonstrate that awareness. I question whether that comes back to budgetary constraints, which prevented —

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute, if he needs it.

Mr Nesbitt: I understand. Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Given the enormity of the task and the fact that we are talking about saving lives, I wonder whether we could look at the revised curriculum and decide whether having "an awareness" of those skills is sufficient, or whether we should reinstate the word "demonstrate".

Training can be delivered as part of the curriculum by adequately trained teachers. Michael McGimpsey's 'Service Framework for Cardiovascular Health and Wellbeing' has already laid the foundation for bringing those skills into schools. Now is the time to make it formal. On that point, I will sit down.

Mr Durkan: I support the motion to advance the crucial need to educate all members of society in emergency life support skills.

I think that all Members here would agree that there is not a lot that you can do in two hours, given that it is such a short period. For the past two hours, I have been trying to write three speeches, so I certainly concur. Perhaps the brevity of this speech will illustrate that point. What we all can and must do is use two hours — that is all it takes — once a year to learn how to save a life.

Eighty per cent of people in Scandinavian countries and Germany have life-saving skills. It is clear that, here in Northern Ireland, we lag behind the rest of Europe by not promoting life-saving skills. In some parts of the USA, it is common practice that students are unable to graduate or even get a driver's licence without knowing those life-saving skills. I have a similar vision for Northern Ireland: our students should be able to assist their friends at school,

their families at home and, later, in the workplace, their colleagues if they are faced with a situation in which they need to save a life.

St John Ambulance recently discovered that 69% of children in the UK would not know how to treat an injury if they were ever faced with such a situation. That is minor treatment, which, while awaiting help, is vital for survival. As the motion makes clear, time is of the essence: with every minute, an individual's chances of survival decline. The simple yet effective skills that ELS training can bring are, in many cases, just as important as ambulance and hospital treatment.

One must recognise the work already carried out by the NHS, namely the TV advertisements that other Members, including Mr Weir, mentioned earlier, which work to educate the mass public on how to recognise the signs of stroke and how to call an ambulance immediately. "When stroke strikes, act FAST": that is self-explanatory and shows the need to react quickly when someone has a stroke. There is also the very imaginative and effective advertisement by the British Heart Foundation, which Mr Weir mentioned earlier. If I ever had to come up with a health promotion campaign involving Vinnie Jones, it would have been about testicular cancer, but the current one is equally effective. The British Heart Foundation is leading the way on promotion, education and training. We must work with it to reach out across the North and build on its already successful campaign.

Ms Ramsey spoke about investing to save and, touching on savings, I would like to draw the Member's attention to the fact that the cost of treating individuals who need cardiac surgical operations in the North of Ireland in 2009-2010 was £17.2 million, plus £3 million for treating Northern Irish patients in the Republic, and £0.7 million for treatment of our patients in the UK. Those costs could be significantly reduced if more individuals were able earlier to recognise and treat the signs and symptoms of heart disease or heart attack. We support the motion.

Mr McCarthy: Like other Members, I was delighted last week to wear the little red heart badge to promote the British Heart Foundation. I will continue to wear it through February, and indeed longer — probably until the next very worthy cause comes along. I will do that to show my full support for the efforts of the British Heart Foundation and, indeed, the Irish Heart Foundation to raise awareness of what happens when there is a sudden cardiac arrest, and what can and should be done without delay. I am delighted that this is an all-party motion to which everyone in the House will give their wholehearted support on behalf of everyone in Northern Ireland, in our community and our constituencies.

Every Member will know of someone who, unfortunately, has suffered an unexpected heart attack. Some will have survived but, unfortunately, some will have died. As the statistics show, here in Northern Ireland, in 2010, over 2,000 people died from heart disease, which I understand is an improvement on earlier years, but we must continue to work towards a further reduction.

We are all totally shocked when a young sports person collapses on the field of sport — or, indeed, any place of sport — and loses their life. It has, unfortunately, happened all too often, bringing overwhelming grief and loss not only to the immediate family but to the whole surrounding community.

We always ask why a perfectly happy, healthy young athlete has been cut down. We do not have any answers.

Such a tragedy alerts everyone, and, in the past, great strides have been made by sporting organisations and voluntary groups to learn about what has happened, take preventative steps and, in a lot of cases, provide defibrillators. It has been mentioned before and, when this item appeared in the Order Paper, I got an e-mail from someone to mention the name of Dr Pantridge, who was the brains behind the defibrillator. I am doing as I was asked, and we have to honour that great man for his great invention.

We must pay tribute also to the many volunteers with their walking shoes, running shoes, bicycles and many other ideas to raise funds and purchase these life-saving defibrillators. At this point, I pay tribute to a senior senior citizen in my own constituency, from Portavogie, who did just that. He asked me to come and launch the walk around the Ards peninsula, which I was honoured to do. I walked with him to the bottom of the street and said that I had to attend to Assembly business, but he completed the walk and raised enough money to provide four defibrillators for the Ards peninsula. That is what it is all about: communities working together to provide them. Of course, they are not much good if there is nobody to use them, so it is important that people have the knowledge to use life-saving equipment.

People young and old know what to do in an emergency to help save a life. I pay tribute to the British Heart Foundation for its very successful work in running the Heartstart campaign, which has also been mentioned and which has given a great number of people the chance to train and learn about emergency life support (ELS) and, indeed, automated external defibrillators (AEDs).

I want to thank again our own Research and Information Service in the Assembly for all the relevant data and information that it has provided to Members. The ongoing efforts by so many people across the UK and indeed down South — I thank them for the work that they are doing. We are all working together to make things better, including, as Mark said, Vinny Jones, who I understand has made some sort of video. In our own north Down and Ards, the bus company has agreed to do some advertising to make people aware of the urgency of getting an ambulance when something like this happens.

It has been said many times that, here at Stormont, we need good joined-up government. Here is the best opportunity for the Department of Health, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment —

Mr Speaker: Time is almost up.

Mr McCarthy: — and the Department of Education to get together and provide the good leadership that we need. I support the motion on behalf of the Alliance Party.

Ms P Bradley: As Miss Ramsey said earlier, with these all-party motions we tend to stand up and repeat the same information over and over again. A lot has been said about the advertising campaign, so I thought for a brief moment that I might stand up and sing the Bee Gees' 'Stayin' Alive' to promote that campaign, but I decided that I would not subject the Members of this House to that. *[Laughter.]*

Any medical condition that causes premature death but can be prevented must become a priority for the Assembly to address. Heart and circulatory disease has been identified in the motion as Northern Ireland's biggest killer, yet in a number of cases it can be prevented by simple lifestyle and dietary changes. The promotion of many of the causes of heart and circulatory disease has been a priority for the Department of Health, and we have seen a large reduction in the number of deaths from the disease since 1980.

Although prevention is important, it is also important that the Assembly focus on what happens when heart disease reaches crisis point. Deaths from heart attacks occur every six minutes. The vast majority of these attacks happen in the individual's home.

That makes the teaching of emergency life support skills a vital tool in our fight to reduce the number of preventable premature deaths.

1.30 pm

Let us be clear about what we mean by emergency life support skills. Those skills are a set of actions needed to keep someone alive until professional help arrives. Through completing the training, the bystander will be able to identify the symptoms of heart attack, deal with a choking person, address serious bleeding and know how to help an unconscious breathing casualty.

It is a sad fact that many in Northern Ireland — a country that is often remarked on for the friendliness of its people — would simply not know how to help a casualty and are at risk of finding themselves in a situation where, through a lack of training, they simply have to stand by and watch someone die. The British Heart Foundation survey found that 52% of people in Northern Ireland would not try to resuscitate a casualty. The main reason given was a lack of knowledge and a fear of making the situation worse. With 81% of people in Northern Ireland claiming not to have received any training in the past five years and research indicating that training needs to be refreshed every year, that is a worrying situation.

Two main components are important for a positive outcome from a heart attack: first, bystander intervention with CPR increases survival for the patient by up to three times; and, secondly, the proximity of the patient to hospital. Every hour that a patient has to wait to receive a stent takes approximately one year off that patient's life. It is not always possible to ensure that a hospital is very close, but it should be possible to ensure that the maximum number of citizens in this country are trained to empower them to feel confident about helping someone when they need it most.

The success of emergency life support skills has been evident locally through a number of initiatives, one of which is in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust. In that area, the Northern Ireland community resuscitation team, in partnership with the care trust and education board, has trained over 500 teachers in 235 schools, who in turn have trained over 15,000 individuals. Some of the schools involved are in my constituency. I can confirm that the feedback from those who have taken part has been positive, in terms not just of the skills acquired to save lives but of boosting individual schoolchildren's self-esteem and confidence.

ELS is unique in that it does not require participants to be great scholars or give any special medical treatment. Basic skills can be taught in as little as two hours out of the school year. Of children who participated in an ELS programme, 98% reported that they enjoyed the training, while 67% shared with family members the knowledge they gained. Children as young as 10 can be taught the full range of ELS, with younger children learning many other skills. It is important that we in the Assembly are not insular when making important decisions. In a number of countries, teaching ELS is accepted as the norm. As Mr Durkan said, in order to graduate from high school or gain a driving licence in Seattle, for example, an individual has to learn first aid skills.

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

Ms P Bradley: The impact of that is that any individual is only ever 12 feet away from someone with ELS skills. I am in talks with the British Heart Foundation to try to get the Health Committee members trained in emergency life support skills.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I, too, support the motion, which is an important motion. Initially, I will quote information that we got from the British Heart Foundation stating that there are different service models for the provision of community emergency life support programmes throughout each of the five health and social care trusts. To ensure provision of an equitable service throughout all trusts, we need to develop and implement innovative, evidence-based community ELS initiatives in collaboration with relevant individuals and organisations in the community, voluntary, statutory and private sectors.

Funding for key posts in health and social care trusts ends on 1 April 2012. It is crucial that the Department and the health and social care trusts have in place a robust and sustainable community resuscitation strategy by that date to ensure that the excellent work that has been done in that area is maintained and local people have the greatest chance possible of surviving a cardiac arrest. The Minister is here, and I am sure that he has taken that on board.

Education, particularly in schools, is one issue that has been mentioned and that I would like to raise. Everybody has anecdotal evidence and stories of things that have happened. When I was in fourth year, a friend collapsed and very tragically died from a heart attack. In hindsight, people wonder whether it would have been a different story if someone had been trained to administer emergency life support skills or resuscitation. Later on, a brother of his tragically died at 17 years of age at a darts match. It was a congenital heart condition. Again, he was not able to be resuscitated. Had those skills been reasonably widely available, we could have had a different outcome.

I think that everybody would be disappointed if I did not mention the cross-border and all-Ireland dimension to this matter. If you consider that the rapid response vehicle for south Armagh was stationed in Warrenpoint, you would know that it would have taken about 40 minutes for it to get to south Armagh in a reasonable time. Fortunately, the Minister listened to the arguments, and, as far as I know, that rapid response vehicle is being relocated. I thank the Minister for taking that on board.

My colleague Sue Ramsey made the point about people in the Chamber having the appropriate skills. If people in the Chamber had the appropriate skills, I wonder how many from the other Benches would rush over to administer CPR to me. Surely that would be a sign — *[Interruption.]* I would have to think about the mouth-to-mouth. *[Laughter.]* Surely, if there was a stampede, it might be an indication of just how far we have come.

Mr Dunne: It is difficult to follow that. However, I welcome the opportunity to speak in support of the motion.

Emergency life support skills are vital and can make an important difference between life and death. Regrettably, heart conditions are an ever-increasing problem in Northern Ireland, with heart and circulatory disease among the UK's biggest killers. It is crucial that we learn how to reduce the risk of heart problems and ensure that the necessary processes are in place to deal with these deadly conditions.

With the majority of cardiac arrests in the UK happening outside hospitals, having the necessary skills has never been more important. An improved infrastructure and a skilled network throughout Northern Ireland could help to ease the pressure and burden on our acute hospitals. As with many health-related problems, early detection and intervention are key to improving the chances of survival and health outcomes. That is reinforced by the fact that, for every minute after cardiac arrest that passes without defibrillation, the chances of survival are reduced by 10%.

Promoting ELS skills in schools should be encouraged. Although it is positive that nearly half our schools have provided training in ELS skills, more could be done. We should aim to reach many more, as school is often the best and most lasting learning environment. The earlier in life ELS skills are acquired, the greater the benefit to everyone. They are practical skills for life that should be prioritised. Education is a central key in improving the health of people in this country. The Department must continue to prioritise public awareness campaigns that promote healthier lifestyles. Improving awareness among our children and young people is an effective and realistic measure that should be taken.

There is the potential for greater use of council-owned leisure centres throughout the country. Giving incentives to young and old to join would help to promote healthier lifestyles. The ongoing heart attack awareness campaign, which has been piloted in a number of areas, including my constituency of North Down, is an example of an effective public awareness campaign.

With the majority of cardiac arrests in the UK happening outside of hospital, it is vital that we equip our communities, workplaces and schools with the necessary skills to perform life support techniques. The first two links in the chain of survival can be delivered by ordinary people. We must maximise that important resource, which will ultimately improve the chances of survival.

Much good work has been done. It is a welcome statistic that there were almost half the number of heart disease deaths in Northern Ireland in 2010 that there were in 1980. However, there is always room for improvement in trying to make the lives of those whom we represent better. A joined-up approach is the way forward. I trust that we will, as a

result, see many more people in Northern Ireland equipped with emergency life support skills.

Mr Kinahan: I am delighted to be able to speak on such an important motion. I am sorry that I was not here at the beginning of the debate and if I requote similar statistics.

If the issue that we are debating is acted on and taken forward, the potential is there for all of us to save many lives. We should all attach that level of importance to the debate. The magnitude of heart disease is alluded to in the motion, which states that it is "Northern Ireland's biggest killer". I will put that into context. British Heart Foundation statistics show that, in the United Kingdom, 83,000 people die every year as a result of heart attacks. In 2010, specifically in Northern Ireland, 2,200 people died of ischaemic heart disease, and 1,200 people died of strokes.

Northern Ireland has a history of innovation. The relevant example is the work of Professor Frank Pantridge — he has already been mentioned today — the physician, cardiologist and inventor. However, I wonder how many of you know the following fact about Northern Ireland: apparently, Air Force One has a defibrillator with nanotechnology that was developed in Belfast. We must congratulate Northern Ireland on leading the way.

The first way in which we can reduce levels of heart disease is by encouraging people to adopt a healthier lifestyle. I, too, could do much better. That means more exercise, healthier eating and reducing the levels of obesity, binge drinking and smoking. That would lead to fewer people having heart attacks in the first place, and Minister Poots has a role to play. Secondly, as you heard, we need to ensure that effective intervention is available as soon as possible after someone has a heart attack. The teaching of emergency life support skills is, therefore, essential. In June 2009, the then Health Minister, Ulster Unionist Michael McGimpsey, published the 'Service Framework for Cardiovascular Health and Wellbeing', standard 9 of which states:

"Health and social care professionals should work with schools, workplaces and communities to raise awareness of and access to emergency life support ... skills".

We also need to ensure that we have adequate hospital facilities with percutaneous coronary intervention — PCI — as that ensures better outcomes for those who have suffered a heart attack. The current Health Minister should look to build on the foundations that have been laid by Michael McGimpsey in this regard, as immediate CPR can improve the chances of survival by up to a factor of three, as the motion states.

I am aware that a pilot scheme in ELS skills is aimed at people involved in sports training. Changes in September 2011 also make it easier for small businesses to avail themselves of training in areas such as resuscitation. Those are examples of welcome developments.

The British Heart Foundation's Heartstart programme has operated since 1996, and it helps to train children in ELS skills. To date, through that programme, the British Heart Foundation has trained over 2.6 million people in ELS skills, of whom 760,000 are children. That is good work from the programme.

You heard from my colleague Paula Bradley that the North Eastern Education and Library Board has trained 500 teachers. I have also confirmed positive feedback from them. I wonder whether, when she is training the Health Committee, she should also train the Environment Committee and all other Committees. It is something that we should all know. Once, however, when I tried to show that I knew something, someone said, "Better that you stay away and we get someone who really knows". I might be more of a danger.

Lastly, I want to comment on the motion's cross-departmental aspect. We call on the Executive as a whole and, specifically, the Minister of Education and the Minister of Health to act appropriately. If the Assembly is to tackle the problem effectively, we all need to work together. I support the motion.

1.45 pm

Mr G Robinson: I must declare an interest in the debate. If it had not been for emergency life support skills administered to me by professional doctors at my local out-of-hours clinic, I would not be here today after I had a heart attack and consequently a double heart bypass in 2003. I congratulate all our emergency services and health workers who do such a fantastic job. I also encourage anyone to train and take up these vital emergency support skills; in my case, had I not been close to professional medical skills, other people with those support skills could have administered the skills that I needed. I also congratulate the British Heart Foundation. Its Heartstart programme has been adopted widely and currently saves lives.

Although I was fortunate to be close to what was then a 24-hour medical facility, many people in Northern Ireland are not that fortunate. It is, therefore, essential that the Assembly supports the provision of life-saving skills to as many people as possible. It is a shocking statistic that, for every minute after a heart attack that defibrillation is not given, the chance of surviving the heart attack drops by 10%. It is not possible for a doctor or nurse to be in every street at the same time. Therefore, members of the public must be taught those skills. CPR is a lifesaver. That is a fact. I want to see as many people as possible in Northern Ireland given that skills set.

I support fully the aims of the motion and welcome the approach that it suggests. The use of community groups, workplaces and the education system will give it as wide an impact as possible and maximise the number of people who take CPR skills on board. Everyone would welcome young people having those skills. I ask all Members to support the motion, so that, in every workplace, community and school, there will be at least one person who can take the speedy action required in the event that someone has a heart attack and save their life.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I welcome the motion and the opportunity for the Assembly to consider this important issue. Heart disease is second to cancer as the main cause of death in Northern Ireland. In 2010, it accounted for around 2,770 deaths. Of those deaths, 1,480 were actually due to acute myocardial infarction, which is better known to people outside the health system as a heart attack.

With regard to the context of the debate, many people have mentioned Frank Pantridge, in whom I have a particular

interest. He was a resident of Hillsborough for many years. He is a fascinating character. He could be quite crotchety. However, sometimes, that goes with brilliance. I see Mr McNarry laughing. That does not mean that everybody who is crotchety is brilliant. *[Laughter.]*

Mr McNarry: I just want to remind the House that it is actually very good for your health to be crotchety from time to time. It means that you relieve yourself of the painful things that, sometimes, happen in life. I know that the Minister is all about relieving pain. I congratulate him on the delivery of that and the service that he brings to the country.

Mr Poots: I thank my friend Mr McNarry for his kind response on this occasion. I wish him well.

When he was a young man, Professor Pantridge went to do his bit in the Second World War. He was taken prisoner — I believe that it was in Singapore — and was put in a prisoner of war camp. To the day he died, he greatly resented the fact that, as a physician, he was not allowed to care for other prisoners. His hands were smashed up, and he could not carry out surgery. However, as a cardiologist, he evidenced many people coming to him too late for him to provide appropriate care and treatment. That is why the motion is important. As a cardiologist, he recognised that something had to be done at an early stage, and that is why he devised the defibrillator.

Although Pantridge got a lot of recognition for that invention, every person who has a wonderful concept needs to put that concept into reality. Just as architects need engineers to make sure that their grand designs can hit the ground, Pantridge needed an engineer for his concept. I understand that that was Dr John Anderson. He is still alive, but he has not got the recognition that he perhaps should have had for his role. I do not believe that Pantridge got the recognition that he should have had either. He should have been properly recognised for the services that he provided. He is a hugely respected character around the world, but he did not get that recognition here in the United Kingdom. I am glad that Lisburn City Council took the steps that it did. However, many others who have benefited from the honours system and other things have made substantially less of a contribution to the well-being of Northern Ireland and beyond than Frank Pantridge has.

To some extent, that was a little diversion. However, if a cardiologist recognised the importance of early response, it is also useful for the House to recognise its importance and its benefits. Each year in Northern Ireland, over 3,500 people are admitted to hospital with heart attacks. The Ambulance Service reported that more than 1,300 cardiac arrests happened outside a hospital environment in 2010-11, thus the earlier issue. The UK-wide figures show that around 30,000 people suffer such heart attacks each year. What is important is that fewer than 10% of those who suffer out-of-hospital cardiac arrest will survive to be discharged from hospital. About three quarters of out-of-hospital cardiac arrests happen in our own homes. Therefore, when someone suffers a cardiac arrest, quick intervention is literally vital, and early resuscitation is essential to give that person any chance of survival. Survival is known to be higher in instances in which a bystander has initiated CPR, and, in the case of shockable out-of-hospital cardiac arrests, immediate CPR can improve a person's chances of survival by up to a factor of three. That is why it

is important that, in addition to statutory provision, as many members of the public as is possible are trained in ELS.

I want to briefly take stock of existing measures that are addressing those problems. The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service operates a fleet of 40 rapid response vehicles to get to victims as quickly as possible. Overall, the Ambulance Service currently responds to 73% of category A calls within eight minutes. It is important to note that all Ambulance Service call-takers are trained to instruct callers, where appropriate, on the provision of CPR. That means that the service can provide immediate life-saving instructions by telephone and that anyone can be a lifesaver.

Many communities in Northern Ireland are rural and, in recognition of that, the Ambulance Service has worked with local communities to set up first responder schemes. First responders are trained members of the public who are called to an emergency by the Ambulance Service. They are not a substitute for the Ambulance Service but are complementary to it. They are volunteers who live or work in a community or a village. First responders can attend in only a limited number of emergencies, such as those that involve chest and heart problems, choking, convulsions, electrocution, diabetic issues and unconsciousness. First responder schemes are now in place in Islandmagee; the glens of Antrim; Slaughtneil, north of Maghera; Broughderg, north-west of Cookstown; Loughguile, County Antrim; the Irvinestown and Enniskillen areas; and on Rathlin Island. The Ambulance Service is currently working to expand the first responder scheme in other areas, including Londonderry, parts of Tyrone and Fermanagh and the Ards peninsula.

Measures aimed at increasing the number of people trained in ELS skills are currently being taken forward. The service framework for cardiovascular health and well-being, which was published in June 2009, recognises the importance of training people in emergency life support skills. In the service framework, standard 9 states:

"Health and social care professionals should work with schools, workplaces and communities to raise awareness of and access to emergency life support (ELS) skills".

The Northern Ireland omnibus survey of January 2010 reported that 26% of respondents answered yes when asked whether they had received training in CPR in the past five years. As part of the implementation of the service framework, the Public Health Agency is working with the health and social care trusts and voluntary providers, including the British Heart Foundation, to ensure that the various programmes that are in place are co-ordinated and integrated. The aim is to provide quality-assured training in CPR equitably across the Province.

I am aware that the Health and Social Care Board is considering a business case for the community development resuscitation officer posts in each of the five trusts. Those staff would be responsible for the delivery of ELS training in schools, communities and across the health service to front line staff. At this stage, it would not be appropriate for me to pre-empt the conclusion of the board's consideration of the proposal.

In addition, my Department has established a pilot scheme to assess the feasibility of training volunteers in ELS skills and the use of the automated external defibrillator to a level where they can cascade the training to others.

The volunteers are from organisations involved in sport, including the IFA and the GAA, and some district councils, including Belfast, Lisburn and Derry city councils. When trained, those volunteers will cascade that training to others in their clubs and organisations, which will create a cohort of trained individuals who may be able to intervene in an emergency situation. The pilot will be evaluated at the end of next month.

I welcome the opportunity to acknowledge the value and scale of the contribution made by community and voluntary organisations in Northern Ireland. CPR training programmes such as those delivered by the British Heart Foundation, ABC for Life, the British Red Cross and St John Ambulance are a vital part of the picture. The British Heart Foundation, through its Heartstart UK initiative, has done excellent work in training the public at large in emergency life support skills. It has provided training to a wide range of people and organisations in the community, including schools, businesses, cardiac patients and their families.

The issues cut across the boundaries between Departments' remit. The motion refers to workplaces and schools, as well as communities. Employers are required to make suitable first aid provision in all workplaces under the Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1982. Changes introduced in September 2011 make it easier for small businesses to avail themselves of training in basic first aid, including resuscitation.

The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure's guide to safety at sports grounds requires managers of sports venues to ensure that proper first aid, medical and emergency life support provision is available at any event with more than 5,000 spectators. In schools, the revised curriculum provides flexibility to introduce ELS training. In addition, the extended schools programme affords opportunities for training young people, parents and teachers. Schools have discretion in sourcing that training and the related materials. Some voluntary organisations have provided schools with guidance materials and resources. For example, the British Heart Foundation's Heartstart pack has been made available to teachers.

The motion calls for the investment that is needed to deliver ELS training in every school, community and workplace. I share that aspiration, in spite of the fact that my resources are finite. The challenge, as ever, is to make the best possible use of the resources that we have. As I have indicated, there is a great deal of existing work that we can build on.

2.00 pm

Mr McCallister: I thank all the Members who participated in the debate. I also echo Mr Weir's words of thanks to the Business Committee for facilitating the debate being held so soon. I gather that some parties had to move slots to accommodate it. I welcome that it has cross-party support. Much has been said in the debate. I suppose, as the saying goes, all has been said, but it has just not been said by everyone yet. I do not propose to take up too much time summing up, because there is broad support for this across the Chamber.

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

Members relayed personal stories. My colleague Mike Nesbitt, Mr McCarthy and Mr Robinson all relayed very personal stories and expressed concern that they may not have the emergency life skills that we would like to see right across our communities. Others, of course, were very thankful and grateful that people nearby had those skills. None of us quite knows how we would react if faced with that situation. We hope that the training that we were, hopefully, given at some point in our lives would kick in and that we would have some idea of what to do.

Mr G Robinson: I thank John for giving way. I had about 10 minutes to 15 minutes to get round to the doctor. If it had not been for my brother, who came to me very quickly at about 6.30 am, I would definitely not be here today. He did not have the skills, but he was on hand to get me to the doctor as soon as possible.

Mr McCallister: That highlights the question of how we would deal with such a difficult situation if faced with it. Would we be able to cope or be of assistance in a critical situation? As every Member said, time is very much of the essence when someone is faced with that. We have had the stats, and, as Members and the Minister said, the difference that an early and timely intervention can make when someone has a heart attack is enormous. The outcomes are better, and there are significantly higher rates of survival. There is massive benefit for everyone involved. It would make a big difference to society, as there is a real human cost.

I recognise the success that we have had over the last 30 years, as Mr Weir pointed out. It is well worth celebrating that the figure has gone from some 5,000 to fewer than half of that. It is also worth noting the work and contribution of many in the community and voluntary sectors. Organisations such as the British Heart Foundation continue to champion the issue.

Ms Bradley talked about wanting to get the Health Committee involved. The Health Committee in the previous Assembly mandate did some basic training, which was very kindly facilitated by the British Heart Foundation. We are overdue a rerun of that, so I think that she will find the rest of the Committee very supportive of the idea.

We need to get training out to people and to look at where we can do it. Of course, many are doing it already. Ms Ramsey, the Chair of the Committee, talked about some of the groups that do it. It may be rugby, football, GAA or other sports clubs, church groups, Boys' Brigade, Girls' Brigade, Scout Association, Girl Guides, Young Farmers' Clubs or whatever. We have to get that training out. The Minister talked about getting the training out and how you cascade it through the system so that we end up with many more people trained in life skills, which is what we want to see right across Northern Ireland.

So, it is important that groups of all ages and from all backgrounds be given training that is not only basic but that cascades down and is renewed relatively regularly. It is about giving people the confidence to intervene whenever they see someone in need, as well as about giving them the skills to make a much more positive, as opposed to a negative, contribution.

There is widespread support for the motion. The Minister talked about where we are now with this, and he mentioned some of the positives, such as the rapid response vehicles. Those vehicles are the first responders in certain areas, most of which he named. A lot of those areas are in rural and isolated locations. Time is critical when you are dealing with an emergency event. It is, therefore, right and proper that we roll out the deployment of those vehicles to as many areas as possible, particularly given that it is more problematic for the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service to get transport, travelling at speed, to an event within a very tight time frame.

I am encouraged by the widespread support for the motion. Many Members, as well as the Minister, mentioned the need to change our lifestyles. Life support training is a hugely important element of that. However, we want to see not only the numbers falling but people developing a much healthier and positive lifestyle through a range of actions. Mr Dunne talked about encouraging people to use council facilities, a point with which I agree and support. We also want to encourage people to use our great outdoors. They can use the many walkways round this city and even those on the Stormont estate. That would make an enormous contribution to their health. We also need to tackle obesity, smoking and binge drinking and to look at diet, because action on all those things combined will make a huge contribution to a healthy heart and mind, which is where we are trying to get to.

It is encouraging that we have had widespread support from all the political parties. The debate has been useful in emphasising the importance of emergency life support skills training. That is what we want to see. We want to see such training cascading down through society, from schools to sports clubs to workplaces. That is what is important, because it will ensure that, should one of us ever be struck down by a heart attack, someone nearby can come to our aid or, indeed, we can go to someone else's aid. I will conclude by thanking all those who contributed, including the Minister.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly is concerned that heart and circulatory disease remains Northern Ireland's biggest killer; notes that, for every minute that passes after a cardiac arrest without defibrillation, the chance of survival is reduced by around 10% but that immediate cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) can improve the chances of survival by up to a factor of three; further notes that, last year, more than 30,000 people were trained in emergency life support skills (ELS), including CPR, by the British Heart Foundation's (BHF) Heartstart programme; supports BHF's campaign to ensure that all schools, communities, and workplaces, provide ELS training; and calls on the Executive, the health and social care trusts and the education bodies to work together to provide the necessary investment to deliver this training to every school, community and workplace.

Welfare Reform

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: As two amendments to the motion have been selected, up to one hour and 45 minutes will be allowed for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. The proposer of each amendment will have 10 minutes to propose and five minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Durkan: I beg to move

That this Assembly believes that the coalition Government's welfare cuts and major aspects of their welfare reform agenda are having and will continue to have a significant detrimental impact on our community; recognises that the impact will be more severe for Northern Ireland given our historically high levels of disadvantage and our higher proportions of families with children and people in receipt of disability living allowance; notes that the accumulated cost of welfare cuts to the local economy could reach £450m; and calls on the Executive to make opposition to a wide range of the welfare reforms their highest priority and to immediately pursue robust negotiations with the coalition Government to pursue all possible legal and operational flexibilities and financial support to mitigate the impact of the welfare cuts and changes imposed on Northern Ireland.

People across the North are already suffering because of welfare cuts, many of which are being imposed prior to the introduction of universal credit. That will simply allow the Tory-led Government to say that their welfare reform, in the guise of universal credit, will result in more money being paid in benefits. That fallacy seems to have been swallowed and has certainly been peddled by some in the Chamber. Although that agenda is hurting vulnerable people across these islands, its impact will be even harsher here in Northern Ireland.

Two weeks ago, a delegation from my party met Lord Freud and the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State spoke of tweaking universal credit, and we told him that, if that was his message, we would actively oppose it. My colleagues told Freud that housing benefit changes in particular would not work, given the segregated character of housing in many parts of Northern Ireland. The firm evidence of less access to affordable childcare here — very different from and much worse than in England — is a central feature of how here is different, and welfare needs to reflect that, given that the purported purpose of reform is to help people back into work.

The levels of disadvantage and disability, the emotional, mental and physical needs resulting from years of conflict and the risk of alienation mean that welfare needs to be different here. That is why we call on the Assembly and the Executive to escalate their efforts in opposing the imposition of those draconian reforms here.

Let me be clear: the SDLP does not oppose the idea of simplifying the social security process. We do not oppose in any way the concept of getting people back to work when or if they are able. We do not oppose welfare reform, but we do oppose unfair reform, and unfair is precisely what many of the reforms are. Previously, we debated changes to incapacity benefit entitlement, the assessment of unwell people as fit to work and their being harassed to

look for work. Little evidence has been received that those work capability assessments take into account the true effects of some people's conditions or their ability to work, particularly in cases of mental illness and conditions such as Parkinson's disease, which fluctuate in severity.

We accept the need to prevent people from abusing the system, but we must not create a system that abuses people. Changes to housing benefit are also certain to have a much more pronounced impact over the coming months. The change to the upper age limit for the shared accommodation rate has the potential to make homeless thousands of young men and women or result in them living in Dickensian conditions. Sticking with Dickens, I think that, once again, it is a tale of two cities, as the fallout from that cut will be much greater here than across the water, given the dearth of houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) here. The reforms are not about simplifying the system; they are purely a Tory tool to cut costs.

The Tories also have great expectations for PIPs, the personal independence payments, which are to replace disability living allowance (DLA). The expenditure on PIPs will be 20% less than that on DLA. That is money coming directly from the pockets of people in need. That restructuring — sorry, reduction — is already under way, with people being assessed as being able to walk 100 metres after barely demonstrating the ability to walk 10 metres. Northern Ireland has a higher percentage of people on DLA than the rest of the UK, which is largely attributable to the legacy of the Troubles. We need a unique solution for what is a unique situation. The proposed changes to DLA also throw up many consequences for carers and, in turn, their families who rely on the carer's allowance. Have the Government estimated how many carers will be affected or, indeed, how much those carers save the public purse? It is essential, in our opinion, that eligibility for carer's allowance is established through both levels of the PIP daily living component to protect carers and enable them to continue providing care.

2.15 pm

These cuts will hurt people who work, too. The divide-and-conquer approach of the coalition Government is to portray welfare reform as a move to cut down on scroungers and gain support from working people to do so. However, working families with disabled children, of whom, again, there is a higher percentage here than elsewhere on these islands, will be worse off to the tune of £1,400 a week — sorry, a year: that was a Freudian slip. That, along with the other reductions in benefits, will inevitably have a knock-on effect on the wider economy, with people having less money to spend on essentials, let alone small luxuries, and local businesses, shops, cafes, taxis and hairdressers will all share the pain at a time when they are already suffering. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has estimated the cost to the Northern Ireland economy at £450 million. Can we afford that?

We support incentives for people to get off benefits. However, there must also be work for people to get into, and I welcome the capital programmes announced by the Executive last week and the jobs that they will inevitably create. Any Government should focus on job creation rather than austerity measures that only serve to perpetuate the dire economic situation. We also support a simplification of the system, particularly any measure that will streamline the

tax credit system, which is a real nightmare, especially for cross-border workers.

We are calling on the Assembly to prioritise the issue of welfare reform. We call for the establishment of an ad hoc Committee to optimise our collective ability to scrutinise the Bill and the wider welfare reform agenda. That agenda will have effects much wider than solely the remit of the Committee for Social Development, and we believe that fuller participation in the Committee Stage of the Bill can help us identify potential wriggle room and chances for damage limitation.

Although Members here are aware of the repercussions of the legislation being handed over from Westminster, the real danger in us blindly accepting it is where it might lead. There is simply too much detail lacking in the Welfare Reform Bill, and when the primary legislation is passed in Britain, it is open to future changes and future abuse. We have seen the lack of social conscience of the current coalition Government, so imagine what we might expect from a single-party Tory Government in future.

We acknowledge attempts made by the Minister — universal credit where it is due — but they are a safety net, not a solution. Hardship funds need to be more substantial and more sustainable. We will have signed up to parity on Tory terms. This is our chance to get a handle on the issue and to shape our own primary legislation. Are we not legislators? I am sure that every Member in the House has at some stage been asked by a constituent or by a visiting school why we got into politics, and I am sure that most, if not all, of us have, at some stage, given the hackneyed answer of, "To make a difference." Well, let us make a difference; or let us at least try.

Mr Easton: I beg to move amendment No 1: Leave out all after "Assembly" and insert

"reaffirms its unanimous support for welfare reforms that are aimed at simplifying the social security process and helping people to get back to work; notes with concern the negative impact that many of the coalition Government's proposed welfare reforms could have on vulnerable people in Northern Ireland; and calls on the Minister for Social Development to continue his robust engagement with the coalition Government and to work with Executive colleagues via the Executive subgroup on welfare reform to pursue, where possible, measures to mitigate the negative impacts of the proposed welfare reforms on Northern Ireland."

The subject matter in front of us today is huge, with many complex issues within it, and will, by its nature, impact on many in our society. However, one could be forgiven for being under the impression that the party proposing the motion was the pioneer, indeed the visionary, that spotted something that the rest of us had missed. While the rest of us were asleep on the watch, they noticed that the reform of the welfare state could negatively impact upon people in Northern Ireland. Indeed, on reading the SDLP motion, one could be forgiven for thinking that that party is the buffer, the resistance, the Dad's Army to welfare reform, while the rest of the House welcomed it unchallenged. Even more alarming, many would also be forgiven for thinking, after reading the SDLP motion, that the Minister for Social Development and the Executive Committee were walking,

at best, blindfolded or, at worst, all-embracing into welfare reform hosted by the Tory-Lib coalition Government at Westminster. We all have concerns.

I hope in the next few minutes to bring a little reality and perspective back into the discussion and address some of inaccuracies of the motion as it stands. We all recognise that the current welfare state needs reformed. It has grown beyond all recognition from that intended by the Beveridge report of 1942, which was followed by the establishment of the National Health Service and national insurance scheme by the then Labour Administration in 1948. However, reform of the welfare state and welfare reform as being pushed through by the coalition Tory-Lib Government at Westminster are two very different animals.

Back in 2009, my party colleague and Member for Strangford Mr Simon Hamilton brought a motion before the House urging the then SDLP Minister for Social Development to work with Westminster to mitigate the worst effects of the welfare reform proposals, recognising parity implications but looking at administration and operational flexibility.

Ms Ritchie: Will the Member give way?

Mr Easton: No, the Member will not give way. That motion, which included calls for reform to simplify the system and, indeed, help people back into work got unanimous support, including from the SDLP.

I believe that I speak for everyone in the House, or, at least, I hope I do, when I say that a welfare system that means that work does not pay is not acceptable, nor is a welfare system that encourages general worklessness as acceptable and, frankly speaking, neither is it affordable. A welfare system that provides a safety net is something that we should be proud of, but it cannot become a lifestyle choice or, indeed, a benefits trap. We need to re-establish the contract between the taxpayer and the benefits system.

The SDLP has a new found role as the resistance against welfare reform, and I cannot let that pass without pointing out that party's track record in recent years. It is the same SDLP, albeit with a few changes of captain at the head of the great ship SDLP, the Minister of which introduced regulations to implement some of the most hard-hitting welfare reforms to date. SDLP regulations brought forward included the cutting of mortgage rate relief and the switching of people from ISA to ESA.

I cannot speak for anyone else, but my constituency office has noticed a significant number of people being turned down for ESA and being forced on to jobseeker's allowance as a result of the SDLP's regulations. I understand the reason why those regulations were implemented. The same parity rule that applies now applied then, but the SDLP cannot pick and choose what attitude it takes to such matters depending on the day.

My party colleagues have been faithful in representing the people who elected them at Westminster, and the voting record bears witness to that fact. The DUP MPs voted against the Tory-Lib Government and all the Lords' reforms bar one. One has to ask at this critical stage what the track record of other Northern Ireland parties that have MPs elected to Westminster is. How have they used their votes in the House of Commons to stand against the negative

elements of the current Welfare Reform Bill where it matters and when it matters?

The tone and implication of the SDLP's motion suggest that the robust negotiations with the Tory-Lib coalition Government have not started. Further, the implication is that the Minister and the Executive are not pursuing all measures to mitigate the impact of welfare reform. That is clearly untrue, and one cannot help wondering if point-scoring within a section of the electorate is of greater importance to the SDLP than scaremongering some of the most vulnerable in our society.

Post-election, my party colleague Nelson McCausland became the Minister for Social Development. One of his first actions as Minister was to engage with Lord Freud, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Minister with responsibility for bringing forward the Tory-Lib coalition Government's Welfare Reform Bill. He has been in written communication with Iain Duncan Smith, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, and, in the months since coming into office, has had a number of meetings with Lord Freud and Maria Miller, Disability Minister, who is responsible for bringing forward DLA and child maintenance reforms.

Officials working on the Minister's behalf from the Department for Social Development (DSD) and the Social Security Agency are in London or engaged with officials from DWP on a weekly, often daily, basis. I understand that the Executive have established a subcommittee whose sole role and remit is to look at welfare reform and its impacts on Northern Ireland. This subcommittee, which I am sure the Minister will speak about, is made up of all the parties represented on the Executive, and includes Alex Attwood from the SDLP.

We all recognise that there are difficulties with the reforms as proposed by the Tory-Lib coalition Government, but we need to get the facts right. The accumulated cost of welfare reform is £450 million, according to the motion. On other days, it ranges up to £600 million. We are currently in receipt of £5 billion annually from the Treasury by way of benefit payments, and by 2015, it is expected that benefits payments to Northern Ireland will have increased by 18%. Let us not alarm people unduly.

As an Assembly and Executive we need to continue, rather than start, to ensure that we have pursued all avenues possible with the Government. We need to continue the process to identify issues where possible, and, more importantly, identify those who will be most affected, before the Bill gets Royal Assent. We need to act with a degree of maturity, recognising the realities of where we are and what limited opportunities we have to make changes within the confines of parity.

I ask that Members consider this amendment, as it reflects, in my opinion, a more pragmatic approach to the real issues facing us in the coming months. The sentiments of the Sinn Féin amendment are largely reflected in this proposed amendment. We need to ensure that the system that comes out of these reforms will protect the needs of the genuinely most vulnerable in our society; helps people back into economic activity, addressing the very real issues of general worklessness; and removes the benefit traps that people often find themselves in today.

I support the work and efforts of the Minister and the Executive subcommittee, and look forward to hearing the outworkings of their discussions.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. As Question Time commences at 2.30 pm, I suggest that the House takes it ease until that time. The debate will continue after Question Time, when Mickey Brady will be the next Member to speak.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

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

Oral Answers to Questions

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr Deputy Speaker: I advise Members that questions 3, 4, 13 and 14 have been withdrawn and will require written answers.

Queen Elizabeth II: Diamond Jubilee

1. **Mr McClarty** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what events her Department is planning to celebrate Her Majesty's diamond jubilee. (AQO 1329/11-15)

2. **Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans her Department has to commemorate the Queen's diamond jubilee. (AQO 1330/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will group questions 1 and 2.

Centenaries and significant anniversaries during the decade ahead will provide all of us on this island with an opportunity to gain greater understanding of our shared past and how it shapes Irish and British identities and, indeed, relationships today. The key issue is not whether the events are remembered but how we remember them. I am supportive of an inclusive, non-triumphalist and strategic approach to commemorations, and I have fully endorsed the principles that the Community Relations Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund developed to remember the past in the context of an inclusive and accepting society. I believe that that is the way forward.

The arts and cultural sectors can provide innovative ways to remember the past. Arm's-length bodies supported by my Department can help to tell stories behind the decade of centenaries and other significant anniversaries. Local councils can also now use the community festival fund to support an inclusive approach to remembering the past. Indeed, a recent event at St Mary's University College on the Falls Road marked the centenary of a speech by Winston Churchill in the grounds of Belfast Celtic football club. It was a drama production that brought the speech back to life and demonstrated the role that arts can play in telling stories, as well as the different perspectives of that period.

Mr McClarty: I thank the Minister for her answer. She spoke for one minute and 25 seconds and gave me no answer whatsoever. As head of the Department dedicated to events such as this, does the Minister not accept that it is the responsibility of her Department to plan such significant events to mark what is an extremely historic event — the diamond jubilee of Her Majesty — which is of great significance —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I think the Member has asked the question.

Mr McClarty: — to the greater number of people? I have asked the question, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Ms Ní Chuilín: My predecessor left a very narrow brief for looking at commemorations and significant events. The brief was to look at the plantation, the Titanic and the period between 1912 and 1922. I am on the record as saying that I am trying to broaden that out to make it more inclusive. That process is still ongoing, and I am in discussion with Executive colleagues about how we do that. However, I have said that a fund is available for councils that want to commemorate events.

Mr Moutray: I declare an interest as a member of Craigavon Borough Council. Given that a number of local authorities plan to mark and fund this significant milestone, does the Minister agree that her Department should put in place appropriate funding arrangements to celebrate this momentous occasion?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. The budget for looking at commemorations and significant events has not yet been set. Members of local authorities asked whether they could use the local festivals fund for commemorations. I would like to clarify now that we are not instructing local councils to use that because we feel that local festivals have been very productive and successful. However, we are looking at ways in which we can support this. In the meantime, we look for groups such as the Community Relations Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund to see whether they can come forward with a funding package that will provide better cohesion.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for her answers. I am a little confused. Is there funding that is outside council funding that is specifically for artistic and cultural events for the whole of Northern Ireland that we can look at proudly at the end of the year?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The funding that we give to councils for local festivals is still there. The question that keeps coming up is this: are local councils to use those funds for festivals for commemorative events? They can do so if they wish. Some councils are reluctant to do that because they feel that the funds that they have are limited enough as it is and are for the community festivals that they have already planned throughout the year. As I said in my answer to Stephen Moutray's question, the only involvement that the Community Relations Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund have in the project is in setting the guidelines. Perhaps we need to expand on funding opportunities. Through the course of this, we will try to find out how we can complement that, if at all possible. At this stage, we are not instructing local government to use its festival funds for commemorations or to mark events.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for her answer, in which she mentions a shared past. What specific steps is the Minister taking to ensure that we commemorate a decade of centenaries in a way that builds a shared future?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The work of all Departments, local government and the Community Relations Council and, in particular, the guidelines of the Heritage Lottery Fund are very mindful of building shared and better relations. Regardless of our political differences, we need to ensure that the approach that we take is based on respect and on the principle that our attitude to commemorations needs to be non-

triumphalist. That is probably the best legacy for building and developing better, shared and good relations for us all.

Mr Allister: May I remind the Minister that the Pledge of Office she took included the words:

“promote the interests of the whole community”?

She has managed to answer questions on the diamond jubilee thus far without mentioning it. She is previously on record as saying, in a written reply, that there will be no extra funding for communities wanting to celebrate the jubilee. She has no plans to co-operate with the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Can the Member come to his question?

Mr Allister: Furthermore, she will not meet the Queen. Has she changed her bigoted stance on any of those issues?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I do not feel that there is an answer that I could give to Mr Allister's question without feeding some of the nonsense, so I am not going to play with him.

Fishing Rights

5. **Mr Sheehan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what proportion of the fishing rights of inland rivers and waterways is in public ownership. (AQO 1333/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Private fishing rights are held and managed by a variety of interests, which include local angling clubs, landowners and commercial operators. Public fishing rights are also held by a number of interests, which include local councils, NI Water and DCAL. DCAL's ownership of fishing rights is managed through the operation of a public angling estate that comprises 63 game, coarse and mixed fisheries for which the rights are either owned or leased. As there is no central register of all fishing rights, the Department cannot establish the proportion of fishing rights of inland rivers and waterways in public ownership.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra. I thank the Minister for her answer. Can she outline the process through which fishing rights can be traced?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Some of the process includes the tracking of ownership of fishing rights, and it usually requires initial enquiries to Land and Property Services in order to establish the ownership of land adjacent to waters. Registered land is divided into distinct parcels, each with a folio number. Examination of each folio should reveal the history of ownership of the land and may also make reference to fishing, sport or other water rights. If ownership of fishing rights is still not clear, the searcher can contact the Department of the Environment's rates office to check if the fishery is rated. In addition to that, the valuation office of the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Public Record Office can be used as useful sources of information for tracing fishing rights.

Mr Dallat: The Minister will be aware that many of the fishing rights date back to the time of the plantation. What plans does she have to make them more relevant, place them in the hands of local communities and get rid of the draconian ways of divvying up fishing rights on our rivers?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his supplementary. In addition to what I said to my colleague Pat Sheehan, I believe that, in this day and age, we should have an inventory of fishing rights and land ownership. I know of the Member's interest in waterways and inland fisheries. We are looking to see how we can establish a register, but it is proving increasingly cumbersome. It is something that the Department has to tackle because, particularly if there is a claim against a piece of land, the Department should have the information without undue delay. I agree that the issue has been ongoing for a long time. It will take time to sort out, but we are determined to try our best to do that.

Mr Swann: On the management of the public or derelict waterways, can the Minister state, once and for all, whether she has directed her Department to make catch and release mandatory?

Ms Ní Chuilín: That is certainly not a supplementary question, but I am happy to answer it.

Mr Swann: It is.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Well, the question was about fishing rights and ownership of rivers, but I understand the campaign that the Member supports. We have asked the angling community in particular for a voluntary catch-and-release programme as part of the conditions for their licences. For anything outside of that, as the Member knows full well, I will need legal advice. That advice is being sought, and, after the debate tabled for tomorrow, which the Member is aware of, and ongoing discussions with legal teams, we will bring forward a position that will be totally clear. If the Member is still not clear, we will be totally clear on any mandatory positions on fishing rights. I assume that he is not talking about anglers; he is talking about nets.

Ulster Canal

6. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the current position on the Erne-Clones stretch of the Ulster canal. (AQO 1334/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: At the NSMC waterways meeting on 14 February, Ministers received a short presentation on the work in progress on the Ulster canal project from upper Lough Erne to Clones. Planning applications were lodged with Monaghan County Council, Clones Town Council and Cavan County Council on 25 October and with the Department of the Environment's Planning Service on 28 October. Cavan County Council has granted planning permission. Monaghan County Council and Clones Town Council have requested further information and clarification. Waterways Ireland is considering those requests and other comments forwarded in response to the planning applications. The relevant land requisition maps and papers are being prepared in readiness for the land procurement process. Pending a successful outcome to the planning process, the land acquisition will be ready to be commenced when funding is committed. Recent information indicates that nine months is the average time it takes for a compulsory purchase order, and Waterways Ireland has in place a draft programme that takes into account planning permission, land acquisition and the letting of the contract.

Mr Brady: I thank the Minister for her answer. Can the Minister tell us how long it will take to complete the work if planning permission is granted?

Ms Ní Chuilín: As I have just outlined, the planning applications have been submitted, and, pending a successful outcome to the planning process, a land acquisition process will be commenced. After that, the contract for the construction phase of the project should be awarded in 2013, following planning approval and the completion of land acquisition. The decision to award a contract will be subject to funds for the capital costs being made available.

Mr Humphrey: I welcome the announcement by the Minister on the Ulster canal and the areas she spoke of. In relation to the stretch of the canal from the boat club at Stranmillis to Lisburn, can the Minister give any comfort to those of us who represent Belfast and Lagan Valley, given that Belfast is the tourism and transportation hub for Northern Ireland?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his supplementary. I recently met members of Belfast City Council and the trust on this issue. The stretch of the towpath, which I think is 11 miles in total, has become one of our prime tourist attractions, and there is huge local involvement. I plan to have a further meeting with Belfast City Council estates management, along with councillors for that area, to see how we can progress these. One of the outstanding things is community engagement, particularly for people living in that area, and that has to be brought forward. I still have not received information on how that will be done. The rest of the information on how this can be processed has been forwarded to Belfast City Council.

2.45 pm

Ulster Canal

7. **Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on her discussions with the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht on setting up an interagency group to determine ways to advance the Ulster canal project. (AQO 1335/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Despite the difficult economic climate, I am keen to continue my work with my counterpart Jimmy Deenihan TD, Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, to find ways of progressing the Ulster canal project and indeed many other areas of mutual interest. My officials have been in discussion with those in the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and Waterways Ireland about the setting up of an interagency group to examine other options for financing and completing the project. I am aware that Minister Deenihan met senior officials of Monaghan County Council, Fermanagh District Council and Waterways Ireland to explore the proposal to set up this group. At the North/South Ministerial Council inland waterways meeting on 14 February, the restoration of the Ulster canal from upper Lough Erne to Clones was discussed, and it was agreed that the terms of reference for the establishment of the interagency group should be drafted and sent to the sponsor Departments for further consideration.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for her answer. I take it that the interagency group has not yet been fully

established but will be established. What time period does the Minister estimate it will be established in? In addition —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I think there are a number of questions there. Minister, please.

Mr A Maginness: Well, OK.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am not too sure what other questions the Member anticipated, but he is free to write to me, and I will be happy to respond. At last week's sectoral NSMC meeting on waterways, the role of setting up this interagency group and setting forward the terms of reference were agreed. To be quite honest with you, I do not know how long that will take. I do not anticipate it being long-drawn-out or going into a matter of months. Like the Member, I am looking forward to seeing what these are and how we can enhance the potential for funding this stretch of the canal.

Mr McKay: Does the Minister recognise the benefit of the canal, not only to the mid-west Ulster region but to County Antrim and County Derry? Will she outline the process to settle any potential land disagreements in regard to this?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I appreciate the potential of the Ulster canal and our waterways, particularly for tourism. The issue of disputes or potential disputes has been raised consistently, particularly in relation to how it may affect landowners. In seeking planning permission for these projects, Waterways Ireland engages with all the local landowners who may be affected and attempts to come to a satisfactory agreement. In the event that Waterways Ireland does not have compulsory purchase power to acquire lands, the appropriate compensation, if it is not agreed, will be set by an independent arbiter. I appreciate the concern that the Member has raised about how this may affect landowners.

DCAL: Cohesion, Sharing and Integration

8. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline her Department's role in the promotion of cohesion, sharing and integration. (AQO 1336/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department awaits publication of the Executive's finalised cohesion, sharing and integration (CSI) strategy. A cross-party working group was established in June 2011 and has been meeting on a weekly basis since September 2011 to achieve political consensus on the range of issues that will underpin a finalised strategy. The work plan of the group has been informed by the findings from the independent analysis of the comprehensive consultation exercise on the programme for cohesion, sharing and integration. The group plans to finalise the strategy and high-level action plan in early 2012. In the interim, my Department continues to meet its statutory obligations under section 75 to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious beliefs, political opinions or racial groups.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for her detailed response. However, will she tell the Assembly how her shared-out listing of two separate language strategies as building blocks instead of a fully comprehensive language strategy will contribute to the promotion of a CSI strategy that all people and parties in Northern Ireland can support?

Ms Ní Chuilín: As the Member may know, I am entitled under the St Andrews Agreement and amended Act to bring

forward two separate strategies for languages. I am sorry that he feels that languages are an issue for CSI. I do not agree with him at all, if that is what the Member has said. In fact, I would almost say that it is a bit offensive, although I would suggest that the Member in his commitment to shared and better relations feels that the Department perhaps needs to look at areas of its work in anticipation that a CSI-approved strategy will come forward. I assure the Member, setting aside what I just said to him, that our Department is very aware and committed to meeting its section 75 duties.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her detailed and comprehensive report. How did DCAL contribute to the draft CSI strategy document?

Ms Ní Chuilín: It is a cross-cutting strategy, and DCAL, like many other Departments, was asked to make a contribution during the development stages of the programme for cohesion, sharing and integration. My officials also held bilateral meetings with the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister during that process to discuss our departmental response. Our policy refers to a consultation document in relation to our own work on cultural diversity, the community festivals fund, regional or minority languages strategy and the Sport Matters strategy.

Mr Nesbitt: Does the Minister think that an Irish language Act or a minority languages Act would be more likely to advance good relations?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I honestly do not see how it would not. I do not know what the issue is for people around languages. It is certainly not something I would put in CSI, so I am not really too sure what the Member's point is. I believe, however, that advancing an Irish language Act, which I intend to bring forward proposals on, will be good for the people who need and are waiting for an Act. I do not believe for one minute that the Member is genuine with regard to his concern about language rights for people from the Irish language community.

Mr Eastwood: Does the Minister's Department take into account the promotion of cohesion, sharing and integration when making funding decisions?

Ms Ní Chuilín: We take into consideration, through our arm's-length bodies, the promotion of section 75. The promotion of section 75 and meeting all its obligations is not a negotiable but an essential prerequisite to a funding application. In addition to what I outlined to my colleague Oliver McMullan around cultural diversity, the community festivals fund, languages and Sport Matters, all those areas are examples of where people have, for example, used sport, arts and culture as a way to develop and strengthen community and good relations.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member is not in his place for question 9.

Ulster Scots: Ministerial Advisory Group

10. **Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the planned expenditure over the next three years for the ministerial advisory group on Ulster Scots. (AQO 1338/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The indicative allocation to the ministerial advisory group is just below £3 million during the period 2012–15. It is intended that that funding will go towards a variety of projects identified by the group. The ministerial advisory group was unable to spend its full allocation of £998,000 this financial year, given the time required to second suitable staff, develop business cases for proposed projects and secure necessary approvals. I have asked my officials to consider further steps to ensure that full spend is achieved during the 2012-15 financial years.

Mr Craig: I thank the Minister for her comprehensive answer. I also thank her for the assurances given with regard to the underspend. Will she also assure the House that there will be no duplication of funding by the Ulster-Scots Language Society and the ministerial advisory group, and will she ensure that what little funding there is for those cultural issues will be maximised?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I can give the Member that assurance. I had a concern about that, too. I have been advised, not just by the Ulster-Scots Agency but through my meetings with the ministerial advisory group, that it is not double funding. Not only should there not be double funding, as the Member said, but the funding should be better used to achieve the needs in the community in a more strategic way. So far, I am convinced and confident that double funding will not happen.

In answer to the Member's question about the plans for 2012-15, I can say that the money was sent back on the basis that it had not been spent. I hope that that will not be the case again. I do not believe that handing money back to the Exchequer is good, and the communities that have good projects and are waiting for some support deserve a far better service than that.

Mrs Dobson: What is the current timescale for the delivery of an Ulster-Scots academy?

Ms Ní Chuilín: There is no timescale for the delivery of an Ulster-Scots academy.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member is not in his place to ask question 11.

Windsor Park

12. **Mr Humphrey** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when the redevelopment of Windsor Park will be completed. (AQO 1340/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI has been appointed the delivery agent for the programme and has been busy working closely with the IFA to take that project forward. As with any large capital build, timescales are reviewed constantly. However, I have made it clear that I expect public funding for that and other stadium projects to be expended by 31 March 2015. Its completion will, therefore, need to have regard to that timescale.

Mr Humphrey: Given that the new manager of the Northern Ireland football team has announced his first squad today, with the return of former captain Aaron Hughes, and that we have the best supporters in Europe, as recognised by UEFA, does the Minister agree that now is a good time for everyone in Northern Ireland to get behind the Northern Ireland football team and its squad?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I do not know what that had to do with his original question. However, he has it on record anyway. Hopefully, given my diary commitments, I will be able to attend the next match.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra.

Given that today is a day for congratulations, I congratulate Derry man James McClean, who has been selected today to play for Ireland.

Will the Minister outline the funding for the other stadiums?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The funding for Casement Park was announced at the end of last week. The Ulster Council will develop its stadium project in Casement Park. That project will be subject to the same conditions, including that the money will be expended by 31 March 2015. I anticipate that Ravenhill will receive planning permission, and I expect developments from the IFA on soccer. That is a good news story for everybody, particularly those awaiting jobs, the construction industry and the sporting communities.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I was advised that questions 13 and 14 had been withdrawn. The Member is not in his place to ask question 15. As there are no further questions, I ask Members to take their ease for a few minutes.

3.00 pm

Education

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have been advised that question 1 has been withdrawn and requires a written answer.

Irish-medium Schools

2. **Ms Ruane** asked the Minister of Education what growth there has been in the Irish-medium sector in the past 10 years and what is the projected growth. (AQO 1345/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat. Over the past 10 years, the number of children in funded Irish-medium education settings at preschool, primary and post-primary level has risen from 2,695 in 2002-03 to 4,392 in 2011-12. The figures for 2002-03 equate to 0.77% of all children in grant-aided schools and funded preschool education. The figure for 2011-12 equates to 1.33% of all children in grant-aided schools and funded preschool education. Pupil projection figures provided by Irish-medium primary and post-primary schools as part of the 2011 school census return project a growth from 2,999 pupils in 2011-12 to 3,207 in 2012-13.

I regard the growth of good-quality Irish-medium schools as extremely important. I will continue to support the growth of the sector within the context of area based plans, which are agreed by all sectors and approved by the Department.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for that answer. Given that growth, does he agree that there is a need to increase the availability of Irish-medium education — náiscoiléanna, bunscoiléanna, meánscoiléanna, and after schools clubs — within a reasonable travel distance for parents across all the Six Counties?

Mr O'Dowd: Yes, is the simple answer. It is one of the growth areas in education. You will have seen the fall in the overall general population of pupils attending school. However, within the Irish-medium sector we have actually seen marginal growth in parents wishing their children to access Irish-medium education. Therefore, there is an obligation on the Department to provide resources to parents for that. We are particularly keen to expand our meánscoiléanna, or post-primary school, education across the North. Indeed, all the other sectors that you touched on will be examined. A number of development proposals are before my Department at this time and are under scrutiny. I will make an announcement about those in due course.

Mrs Hale: Will the Minister give his assessment of any detrimental effects on the Catholic maintained sector and schools in general arising from the viability criteria and funding arrangements for Irish-medium schools?

Mr O'Dowd: The Good Friday Agreement is in place and legislation is in place, and there is a demand from parents for Irish-medium education. It is not a case of there being a detrimental effect on one or other sector. We have a duty, under all those pieces of legislation and the agreement, to provide Irish-medium education. The viability criteria are in place so that we can enhance the growth and promote the use of Irish-medium education.

I encourage as many Members as possible to visit their local Irish-medium schools, to talk to the teachers, the parents and the pupils and to experience what is going on. This is about young people, children, learning through the medium of Irish. They come from all backgrounds and all walks of life and all have different opinions on many different matters. I think that it would broaden the mind of many Members if they were to visit and engage with their local Irish-medium school, rather than relying on myself, or any other Minister, to relay what the experiences are in those schools.

Mr Kinahan: I like the idea of going to an Irish-medium school to find out what is going on. However, could the Minister detail how the annual expenditure on a child in the Irish-medium sector compares to that of the other three sectors?

Mr O'Dowd: I do not have the figures in front of me, but I can provide them to the Member. All funding arrangements, for any school sector, are open and transparent and available to Members of the Assembly or any other organisation that wishes to access that funding information.

Mrs McKeivitt: Does the Minister believe that Irish-medium sector schools would benefit from the introduction of an Irish language Act?

Mr O'Dowd: I understand that my colleague the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, who has just answered questions, is responsible for an Irish language Act. I will allow the Minister to respond in detail on her plans for an Irish language Act.

Irish-medium education is protected under legislation, and it is protected as a result of the negotiations and discussions that flowed from the Good Friday Agreement. So, there is a legislative basis upon which Irish-medium education is provided.

Preschool Admissions: Criteria

3. **Mrs Cochrane** asked the Minister of Education whether the July/August birthdays admissions criterion will be revoked in time for the preschool admissions process for the 2013-14 academic year. (AQO 1346/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The decision to remove the July/ August birthday criterion from the priority criteria for preschool admissions is one of a number of actions that are outlined in the recent review of preschool admissions arrangements that was announced in January. As I indicated in my statement to the Assembly, the report is a framework for action. The removal of the priority criteria will require a legislative process. I will move as quickly as possible to remove the criteria from legislation.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Minister for his action. I hope that he will be able to do that before the booklet is produced in September for the following year. Given that the application process for 2012-13 is under way, could the Minister outline any steps that he is taking to ensure that extra funded places are being made available in areas where the education and library boards have identified pressures?

Mr O'Dowd: My Department is in discussions with the education and library boards on that very issue. We are aware of a number of geographical areas where there is a higher demand than expected for preschool education places, and we are now trying to assess how we meet that demand.

Mrs Dobson: Can the Minister give an indication of how many young children will be directly affected by his decision to change the July/August birthday admission criterion?

Mr O'Dowd: Let me assure parents that the change to the July/August birthday criterion is not intended to discriminate against anyone or to prevent young people in that age band from accessing school. Several different reports have identified that priority criterion as causing disadvantage to other pupils. Therefore, it is not a case of my wishing to exclude anyone from preschool settings. I want to open up preschool settings to as many children as possible. I do not have the exact figures to hand for the number of pupils who accessed preschool last year on the basis of the July/August birthday admission criterion, but I will ask my officials to forward those figures to the Member.

Mr McDevitt: Does the Minister concede that all best international practice and evidence points to the need to be able to give a statutory guarantee to every child who is 3 years of age that they will have a right to a preschool or nursery school place? Can he tell us when he will bring such proposals to the House?

Mr O'Dowd: Is the Member suggesting that all best standards are not being practised by not having such a statutory obligation? I have no evidence that that is the case. We have conducted a thorough review of preschool education, and we will move forward now to ensure that all parents who want their children to attend preschool will have places available to them. That is a commitment that not only comes from my Department but is in the Programme for Government. So, that right will exist and will be actioned. The Member has never brought to my attention in any debate that I have had with him the international best practice, report or study to which he refers that states that placing this on a statutory basis would improve the rights

of any parent or child. We are now focused on ensuring that places are available for all parents who want their children to have preschool education.

Minister for Education and Skills

4. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the work that he is undertaking with the Minister for Education and Skills in Dublin. (AQO 1347/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am working closely with the Minister for Education and Skills on a wide range of issues of mutual interest and benefit. We co-operate on several fronts through the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC). Recently, the joint educational underachievement working group has focused on the sharing of good practice in literacy and numeracy. The working group on teacher qualifications has sought to remove barriers to the professional recognition and registration of teachers in both jurisdictions. It has also developed programmes to share best practice across the sectors. A multi-annual plan for the Middletown Centre for Autism that will be deliverable within the financial constraints of both Departments is being developed jointly. Proposals on the way forward will be put forward for Minister Quinn and I to consider at our next NSMC meeting at the end of May 2012.

In the context of an ongoing joint study of North/South education co-operation, Ministers agreed at the most recent NSMC meeting, which was held on 1 February, to proceed with a joint survey to inform cross-border pupil movement and school planning. Minister Quinn and I agreed on the importance of facilitating parental preference for school attendance, irrespective of where the parents' preferred school is located. This survey will inform that discussion by establishing the potential demand for cross-border schooling. I hope that, when the survey takes place later this year, it will generate widespread participation.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil leis an Aire as a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his answer. What is his Department's assessment of the need for enhanced North/South co-operation on school enrolments and the planning of the schools estate, specifically for rural communities along the border corridor?

Mr O'Dowd: There has been a recent focus across the political parties on the need to secure education for young people in the rural corridors on either side of the border. I intend to play my part in that. The survey that we will issue later this year will identify how much demand there is among parents and pupils and how the Administrations should meet that demand. The survey will involve a written questionnaire focusing on the population in the border corridor for whom school choice is a topical issue. If possible, the option of an online survey will be included. An estimated 30,000 to 50,000 households will be involved, and all practical means of communication will be explored and implemented to ensure a high return. That survey should be completed and options appraisals prepared for the attention of Minister Quinn and me by the time of the first North/South Ministerial Council sectoral meeting of 2013. We will progress the work and meet the demand identified in the survey.

Mr Byrne: Will the Minister have any discussions with the Education Minister in the Republic, Mr Quinn, that centre on the curriculum? The Minister will be aware that the common curriculum in Northern Ireland involves GCSEs and A levels, whereas the Republic has a more general curriculum that is similar to the Scottish model and involves junior certificates and leaving certificates. How does the Minister propose to work on that?

Mr O'Dowd: Work is ongoing on the recognition of qualifications on either side of the border. As I think that our current curriculum delivers for the needs of young people locally, I have no plans to change it. However, we want to ensure that we have a common understanding and recognition of qualifications.

One of the issues that has caused some concern was the mixed reception thus far of a number of universities in the South to the A* qualification. I discussed that issue with Minister Quinn, and I am glad to say that discussions are continuing between my departmental officials and Minister Quinn's officials. We hope to be able to issue a joint response in the near future. However, that matter rests largely with the universities across the border and depends on the response of the Irish Universities Association. I hope that, if Mr Quinn and I can agree on the matter, the universities will also agree.

Mr Storey: Minister, have you had any discussions with the Minister in the Irish Republic on special educational needs, other than on the provision of the centre in Middletown? In a debate in the Irish Republic on 11 September, your party was extremely critical of the Education Minister in the Republic, especially on the issue of special educational needs provision and the increase in the pupil:teacher ratio there. Sinn Féin cannot have it both ways. It cannot be critical of what is happening in the Irish Republic —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member please finish his question?

Mr Storey: It cannot be critical of what is happening in the Irish Republic and do exactly the same thing. When will the Minister act in the best interests of the children in Northern Ireland and stop chasing moonbeams, especially the one in Middletown?

Mr O'Dowd: I welcome the Member's detailed interest in debates in the Dáil, particularly his interest in Sinn Féin contributions. It is always good for people to broaden their minds and horizons.

Mr Storey: They were in English.

Mr O'Dowd: Whatever language they were in, that is a welcome fact.

It is not appropriate for me, at this Dispatch Box, to get involved in the debate about how the Dublin Government fund education. However, we have ring-fenced funding for special educational needs in this jurisdiction and have not made cuts in that area. The money is there, and it has been secured.

3.15 pm

The Member well knows that, working with the Finance Minister and the First Minister and deputy First Minister, we have invested more money in the overall education budget in this jurisdiction. We are not involved in a penny-pinching

programme against the most vulnerable in our society. We face very difficult issues as a direct result of the £4 billion that the British Government have taken away from our Budget, but those are matters that the Executive continue to study, and they will decide how to deal with them.

I can assure the Member that we are not chasing moonbeams when it comes to Middletown or any other matter. I have said that a report is being prepared on Middletown by both Departments, which will be put before the next North/South Ministerial Council meeting in education sectoral format in May. We will make a decision on the way forward for Middletown on that occasion.

Maghera High School Site

5. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the expressions of interest in the former Maghera High School. (AQO 1348/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Expressions of interest in the former Maghera High School site were received from Magherafelt District Council, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, Conhairle na Gaelscolaíochta and Largantogher enterprise group. Magherafelt District Council subsequently withdrew its interest in the site. All options for potential future education use of the site are being explored by the North Eastern Education and Library Board in conjunction with my Department.

Mr I McCrea: The Minister highlighted those that have an interest. Is he aware that a decision is required on this matter because of outside interests from the private sector? If he decides to consider one of the options in front of him, will he advise the House as to who will pick up the tab for the purchase of the site, and will he ensure that any decision is made without any political bias?

Mr O'Dowd: The decision on the use of the site will be driven by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) guidelines on the disposal of public assets and by the needs of education, if it is to be an education site, in the Maghera area. I am not going to discuss any private interest that there may be in the site, because, obviously, there are commercial interests, and I am not involved in any of those discussions. There is a stated way forward for such matters and I will leave it up to my departmental officials and the North Eastern Education Library Board to deal with the situation, as I would when disposing of any other asset.

Mrs Overend: Will the Minister give some details on the process? Is it his intention to consult on the proposals that have been put forward for the use of the former Maghera High School site to ensure the best use of the building and take into consideration the thoughts and feelings of the people in that area and the local education and library board? If so, how will he go about doing that?

Mr O'Dowd: As I said to the Member who spoke previously, we will follow the DFP and Land and Property Services published guidance on the disposal of surplus public sector property, which advises that surplus property must either be transferred within the public sector at market prices or put on the open market with the least possible delay. It is considered good practice to keep former site owners apprised of the disposal process concerning their former property because they may have a statutory right to have the land offered back to them in specific circumstances. I will

ensure that the guidance on the disposal of the site will be followed. If it allows for consultation with key stakeholders, such as the surrounding community or the education and library board, that consultation will take place.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister outline what the potential savings would be to the ratepayers where existing and unused quality buildings can accommodate the growth of the Irish-medium sector rather than spending money on newbuilds? Will he confirm whether a development proposal has been published in relation to Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta's plan to establish a school at the site in question?

Mr O'Dowd: It is only wise and prudent that we use our existing schools estate to develop education, and that, where high-quality vacant buildings exist, they are used for the best purpose. There will clearly be significant savings if we can utilise existing sites for the development of any sector, including the Irish-medium sector. I am aware that an Irish-medium development proposal for the Maghera area is to be published, although, at this stage, I do not need to be aware of whether it has been published yet. However, I will treat that proposal as I would any other, and I will go through the stated criteria to do so.

North Eastern Education and Library Board: Youth Services

6. **Ms P Bradley** asked the Minister of Education what guidelines are in place to ensure that children with additional needs or learning difficulties in the North Eastern Education and Library Board area can participate in mainstream youth provision. (AQO 1349/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Youth provision in the North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) area is a matter for the NEELB. The NEELB is subject to the duties imposed on public authorities under section 75. The NEELB has advised that it is fully committed to providing appropriate services for all young people in its area and operates a policy of inclusion, drawn up in partnership with Mencap, for young people who have additional needs or learning difficulties.

For the majority of young people, additional support requirements are assessed and met by local youth groups without the involvement of the board. Where such requirements cannot be met locally, board officers are available to provide advice and support with assessments and discuss additional support available from the board. Such support may include an additional paid leader to support young people with learning disabilities to integrate into mainstream youth provision.

The board provides training for workers and volunteers on equality and inclusive youth work practices, including workshops/awareness sessions on a range of specific learning difficulties and disabilities. Board officers also regularly visit larger groups to discuss their inclusion practices, including engagement with, and programmes for, young people who have additional needs or learning difficulties.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will any additional resource be made available for youth services, specifically those involving special needs, as a result of the ongoing special educational needs (SEN) review?

Mr O'Dowd: Youth services are an integral part of our education service delivery. As part of the SEN review, we will examine how we ensure that youth services are delivered in a fair and equitable manner to all our young people, including young people with special educational needs. We have a duty of care and a responsibility to all young people. I want to ensure that all the Department's bodies, whether the education boards now or the Education and Skills Authority in the future, look after the needs of young people with SEN.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister give an update on his Department's priorities for youth strategy?

Mr O'Dowd: My officials are drawing up a draft priorities for youth strategy. I will study that document closely, and it will then go out to consultation. As I said, youth services are an integral part of education. We want to ensure that our youth services are delivered to assist and promote education in a different and less formal setting. We want to ensure that we use our youth services to improve and enhance young people's life opportunities.

Mr Durkan: What training is in place for teachers for teaching children with autism in mainstream schools?

Mr O'Dowd: There are a number of training opportunities for teachers for dealing with young people with additional or special educational needs. I will forward details to the Member. Under the SEN review, we want to ensure that we have in place a training and career enhancement package that allows teachers to be there at early identification of the special educational needs of young people. Where appropriate, they are the focus of how we assist and improve the lives of young people with SEN, whether it is autism or another form of special educational need.

Mr Agnew: Given the changes to the way in which the posts of classroom assistants for those with special educational needs are funded, will the Minister guarantee that the service will remain universal?

Mr O'Dowd: One reason why we introduced the SEN review was to ensure that we have universal provision across the North. Therefore, I am not sure what point the Member is making about the change in funding for classroom assistants. The proposal on the way forward for special educational needs is that the service is universal across the North and that we do not have a patchwork quilt of services delivered in different board areas or different schools. The criteria will be that the services meet the needs of the child, which is the important thing.

Special Educational Needs

7. **Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister of Education why he is changing the system currently in place for children with special educational needs. (AQO 1350/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education undertook a review of special educational needs and inclusion that resulted in a formal consultation on proposals contained in 'Every School a Good School – The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion'. The review was essentially undertaken to address the well-documented issues with the current framework that had arisen over time. The main reasons for the review were the inconsistencies

and delays in assessment and provision across the education and library board areas, the large numbers of special needs children being educated in mainstream schools who required their needs to be met and the high level of bureaucracy associated with the current framework.

There have been large increases in the numbers of children with SEN, statements and significant needs; those children now make up around 20% of our school population. That is a very different position from that which existed when the system of statements was first introduced in 1986. Those factors combined have put mounting pressures on the pupils concerned, their parents, teachers, schools and boards of governors.

I am progressing with changes to the current system to ensure that we provide a more equitable framework that will meet the needs of all children with SEN across all our schools. I want all schools to have the capacity to identify and assess a child's learning needs and to ensure that interventions are put in place as early as possible in order to enable every child to progress and to reach his or her individual potential. I also want to ensure that each education and library board, and in time, the Education and Skills Authority, is able to provide training and support for schools and interventions for pupils in a much more timely and responsive way than at present.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he agree that it is important to make sure that the parents of children with special needs are kept fully informed of what is going on and have some input into the final outcome?

Mr O'Dowd: I fully agree with the Member. There has been quite a lengthy consultation process, and rightly so. There were nearly 3,000 responses to the original consultation. In recent times, I have set out for the Education Committee and the public my broad proposals on the way forward. There has been further consultation with key stakeholders in the meantime. In the not-too-distant future, I want to set out what I believe is the best way forward for the provision of SEN in our communities. Any significant changes, be they to legislation or to policy direction, will require further consultation. If legislative change is, indeed, necessary, the required legislation will have to go through the House and the consultative process that all legislation has to go through. None of that will be done away from the glare of public attention, and rightly so. I want to ensure that parents, educators and young people with special educational needs are continually kept informed of any planned changes.

Mr Nesbitt: Can the Minister say how many children who are currently statemented are likely to lose that status under the review?

Mr O'Dowd: No, and I think that it would be wrong for anybody to get involved in guesstimates around that. The needs of each and every child will be assessed and the best programme of work for that child will be put in place. In some instances, that work will be referred to as a co-ordinated support plan, and in other instances, it will be referred to as a personal learning plan, both of which will have a legislative basis and legislative protection.

I am sure that Members can recall many instances in their constituency office where parents said that they were frustrated at either the delay in the statementing process or

the outcomes of it. Let us not let ourselves get too anxious about statementing. The outcomes for the child are the important thing. Parents' concerns appear to stem from the fact that they want to ensure that there is a legislative basis for such matters, and I assure them that there will be a legislative basis and legislative protection for their children.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Does the Minister feel that recent media reports have misrepresented the changes he is making to the special educational needs framework?

Mr O'Dowd: I can fully understand why parents became exasperated and, indeed, in some cases, quite angry when they heard headlines such as, "Department of Education to scrap statementing". Any parent who has been through the process to achieve a statement will be, quite rightly, very protective of that statementing outcome. We are not here to scrap the rights of any vulnerable children. We are here to protect those rights. Through the new process, I can guarantee that, be it through a co-ordinated support plan or a personal learning plan, children's entitlements and rights will be protected under the law.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes Question Time for today. I ask Members to take their ease for a few moments, please.

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

3.30 pm

Private Members' Business

Welfare Reform

Debate resumed on amendment to motion:

That this Assembly believes that the coalition Government's welfare cuts and major aspects of their welfare reform agenda are having and will continue to have a significant detrimental impact on our community; recognises that the impact will be more severe for Northern Ireland given our historically high levels of disadvantage and our higher proportions of families with children and people in receipt of disability living allowance; notes that the accumulated cost of welfare cuts to the local economy could reach £450m; and calls on the Executive to make opposition to a wide range of the welfare reforms their highest priority and to immediately pursue robust negotiations with the coalition Government to pursue all possible legal and operational flexibilities and financial support to mitigate the impact of the welfare cuts and changes imposed on Northern Ireland. — [Mr Durkan.]

Which amendment was:

Amendment No 1: Leave out all after "Assembly" and insert

"reaffirms its unanimous support for welfare reforms that are aimed at simplifying the social security process and helping people to get back to work; notes with concern the negative impact that many of the coalition Government's proposed welfare reforms could have on vulnerable people in Northern Ireland; and calls on the Minister for Social Development to continue his robust engagement with the coalition Government and to work with Executive colleagues via the Executive subgroup on welfare reform to pursue, where possible, measures to mitigate the negative impacts of the proposed welfare reforms on Northern Ireland." — [Mr Easton.]

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I beg to move amendment No 2: After "impact on our community" insert

"and, given the British Government's record of rejecting all proposed changes, even those championed by their own second Chamber, calls on all parties to defend the objectives of the Programme for Government and use the powers of this institution to protect our most vulnerable citizens".

What we have heard so far is fairly predictable, and I am sure that Members will also consider what I am going to say to be fairly predictable. I will start by putting into context the ethos of the welfare state, what it was about and what it should be about. Paragraph 27 of the Beveridge report states:

"Social insurance should aim at guaranteeing the minimum income needed for subsistence...determination of what is required for reasonable human subsistence is to some extent a matter of judgment; estimates on this

point change with time, and generally, in a progressive community, change upwards."

Today, the concept of welfare as a right is being eroded. The collective security that welfare provides is being portrayed as a burden on society and, frequently, those in receipt of benefits are being portrayed as undeserving. This British Government are seeking to create a divide between those in work and those out of work, arguing that it is unfair on those in work to pay for those out of work. The welfare state was founded on the collective principle of social insurance where everyone contributes to a system that insures everyone against poverty. What could be fairer than that?

The current British Government are attacking the welfare system by cutting £18 billion from welfare while giving away more than £25 billion in corporate tax breaks over the same period. They are emphasising the costs of fraud while turning a blind eye to £120 billion of tax lost through erosion, evasion, avoidance and non-collection. The attacks on welfare are not just financial; welfare is being vilified in a propaganda campaign that suggests that welfare is too generous, that claimants are lazy and fraudulent and that public servants are not fit to run welfare services. The real scandal with welfare is not people receiving what they are not entitled to but people not receiving what they are entitled to. For example, approximately £1.9 million in pension credit is unclaimed weekly here in the North.

Low pay is endemic in many sectors of the economy, including catering, cleaning and caring, so it makes sense to focus efforts on ensuring that work pays through tackling low pay. The role of benefits to the disabled and those suffering ill health has changed dramatically over time as social attitudes have changed. The demonisation — a word that the Minister objected to — of those on benefits has become commonplace, but no area of welfare has been subjected to such vitriol as those on disability benefits. The first move of the British coalition Government was to attack disability benefits with reassessments for those on ESA and DLA. Seventy-six thousand people on incapacity benefit are being migrated to jobseekers' allowance. There have been all sorts of attacks of those in receipt of DLA, yet official government figures indicate that DLA is the least fraudulent of benefits at less than 0.5% lost through fraud. Even the architect of the new ESA system, Professor Paul Gregg, admits in relation to the work capability assessment:

"The test is badly malfunctioning. The current assessment is a complete mess."

Disabled people continue to remain among the poorest members of society. There is a need for the flawed, privatised assessment programme to be abandoned, and there should be a return to a system of assessment by NHS staff and GPs. DLA needs to be supported to allow more disabled people to lead independent lives. We also need to make a determined effort to tackle child poverty by removing the causes of adult poverty.

Mr A Maskey: I thank the Member for giving way. We are receiving reports from this morning's Joint Ministerial Committee (JMC) that the First Minister and deputy First Minister have raised this matter directly with the British Government and representatives from all of the other devolved institutions. Agreement has been reached that there will be a substantive discussion at the next JMC

meeting on the issue of welfare reform. Does the Member welcome that as a very important message to be given out? Clearly, all the contributors to the debate so far have acknowledged that there are fundamental problems with the current welfare reform agenda that is being pursued by the British Government.

Mr Brady: I thank the Member for his intervention, and I welcome what he said. This type of discussion will focus the minds of all parties in the Assembly, and surely the purpose of the debate is to ensure that we are all pulling in the same direction.

We need to make a determined effort to tackle child poverty by removing the causes of adult poverty, such as low pay and low benefit levels. There is also a need for publicly funded childcare to allow parents to work and study and to support and encourage children's development. The official poverty line is £170 a week, and the basic state pension is £102 a week. According to the projected figures for universal credit, it will become £145, which is still well short of the poverty line. Society has changed in many ways since the Beveridge report, and there have been major changes in social attitudes, household composition, etc. However, some things are timeless: unemployment, retirement, disability and illness remain major causes of poverty and affect everyone.

What is required is a welfare state that allows everyone to have a decent standard of living free from poverty; a Government that commit to full employment; and a welfare system based on need and not on moral judgements. There is also a need to end the low pay that leaves people dependent on means-tested benefits. Finally, it is the mark of a civilised society to support people when they are in need, whether they are ill, disabled or unemployed. Welfare is there to provide a decent existence, and it is incumbent on all parties in this institution to protect those most vulnerable and in need in our society.

I will welcome the Minister's statements if he commits — I know that he has committed to some degree — to mitigating the most serious impacts that welfare reform will have on the most vulnerable in our society. We need to focus on that because, too often — I have tried to bring this out — people are vilified for no good reason. We need to get our acts right in how we project the image of the Assembly in protecting and representing people, and we are doing our best to make sure that they are not affected by these draconian and, some might say, serious cuts to the standard of living that people enjoy. I have never met anybody who said, "I love living on benefit". It does not happen. Some people may have been caught up in that lifestyle, but it is out of necessity, not choice. That needs to be taken on board.

Mr Copeland: I welcome the opportunity, if that is the right word, to speak on this matter, which, as we know, will probably figure in and perhaps dominate, justifiably, this entire Assembly term.

No one in this Chamber who is possessed of an ounce of compassion or understanding will doubt how wide-ranging the changes that are proposed in the Welfare Reform Bill are. So far, this House has had to vote on welfare change on a couple of instances, and, at this stage, I would appreciate from the Minister, who is listening as always, a reaffirmation of his undertaking to examine the mitigatory measures that

he spoke of when we last discussed the changes to the shared room rate.

Reform to the United Kingdom's welfare system is badly needed, whether we are in favour of it or not. It has been in place for quite a long time. When Tony Blair came to power with the last Labour Government, no note was found in the Treasury saying that there was no money left. However, millions of people were on benefit. When Mr Blair left after a 10-year period of economic growth and prosperity for some, millions of people were still on benefit. If there was ever a sign that something was not working, it was that.

I am sure that all of us who have ever worked in trying to guide a citizen through the minefield that the benefits system in Northern Ireland has become will agree that the system needs to change. It is too complex and unwieldy. There are too many benefits, with too many different criteria, leading to much confusion among people who are not best equipped to understand forms or deal with the conclusion.

Doing nothing is not an option, as inaction will only make things worse in future as welfare expenditure starts to cripple our public spending, which, left unaddressed, it undoubtedly will. Therefore, the stated goal of universal credit is understandable. It is to simplify a system that is at present unfit for purpose, to acknowledge and help those who require help, and to remove the likelihood of someone who does not deserve to receive a benefit receiving it.

At the moment, for some people who find themselves reliant on benefits, the benefits of returning to work can be extremely low. In the current system, many who move from welfare to employment — should they be lucky enough to find employment — find all or almost all their earnings deducted from their benefits. People are simply not prepared to take the risk. Who in this Chamber would stand in judgement of them for holding those things in the balance, especially if it impacts on their families and, more particularly, their children?

That failing is not simply penalising the recipients by limiting their opportunities, such as they are; it can also be seen as having a knock-on effect on the social and economic impacts across the United Kingdom. Young people growing up in jobless households are much more likely to struggle to find stable employment. The fact that Northern Ireland has spent more on welfare payments than on the provision of health and social care should, at the very least, raise fundamental questions about the viability of the system. However, we must never forget that it is people's lives that we are talking about. It is not right to think purely about employed and unemployed; it will have just as much impact on people with disabilities or those with families receiving housing benefit.

To the SDLP's credit, the motion rightly points out that many of the proposed reforms will have a disproportionate effect in Northern Ireland. I do not think that that is purely because the coalition Government are deliberately targeting the Province; it is because many of the biggest factors of benefit dependency are, unfortunately, rife here. Northern Ireland suffers from a high claimant count and the highest level of economic inactivity in the United Kingdom.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close please.

Mr Copeland: There are also significant mental health difficulties compounded by 30 years of politically motivated murder and unspeakable violence. Latest figures suggest that there are over 50,000 men and women here who are incapable of work.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is up.

Mrs Cochrane: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion and the amendments. No one can fail to be aware of the potential impact of welfare reform in Northern Ireland. Although the Alliance Party is supportive of reforming the welfare system to incentivise people to work where possible and to enable those caught in the benefits trap to gain skills and to contribute positively to society, we do have serious concerns with the Welfare Reform Bill in its current form. Bluntly put, you have to be able to get a job or have the opportunity to increase your working hours for the current proposals to mean anything other than simply punishing the poor.

Others have already touched on the detrimental effects that the proposed welfare reforms will have in Northern Ireland, and I would like to draw attention to a few of those. Northern Ireland is one of the poorest regions in the UK, with historically high levels of disadvantage. In addition, we have a significantly higher proportion of people likely to be affected by the stricter medical test for claiming the new disability benefit, with over twice as many claimants per thousand here than in England. We also have a larger proportion of households with children, who, as the Institute for Fiscal Studies research has shown, comprise the group that will lose most as a percentage of income from the proposed changes.

There are also serious issues with the new universal credit; for example, the proposal that it is to be paid monthly to claimants in order to prepare them for working life. That could be catastrophic for vulnerable tenants who have never had to budget on a monthly basis and could end up in a much worse situation by being a month in arrears instead of a week. Similarly, over 133,000 people in Northern Ireland have a direct payment set up with their landlord, which ensures that their accommodation is never in jeopardy and helps to reduce the risk of personal debt. I see no benefit in disallowing tenants the choice to have their benefits paid directly to their landlord to protect their tenancy. Not only does direct payment benefit the tenant, but the financial security for social landlords that comes with that has been critical to their ability to secure private investment at highly competitive rates, thereby maximising their capacity to deliver much-needed, affordable homes to the taxpayer.

3.45 pm

A recent report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies shows that universal credit will strengthen the incentive for single individuals to do low-paid work and will particularly strengthen the incentive for couples to have one person in work rather than none. However, the report goes on to say that universal credit will weaken the incentive for both to work rather than just one, which clearly goes against the original intention.

Furthermore, I do not see universal credit as a simplification of the benefits system. It may have one label, but there are umpteen different tests and barriers depending on the basis of the claim.

We need to be realistic, and I agree that we should call on the Executive to determine through their subgroup on welfare reform what limited movement we have to try to alleviate the negative impact that welfare reform could have, perhaps with regard to discretionary housing payments and the social fund. Indeed, if those were the "powers of this institution" to which the amendment proposed by Sinn Féin refers, we could support it. However, if it is a suggestion that we break parity, that would be more difficult.

My colleague in Westminster, Naomi Long, has voted against the Welfare Reform Bill at every stage. Unfortunately, however, it appears that, if the argument is not won in Westminster, breaking parity in the Assembly is unlikely to be financially feasible. I agree that we need to negotiate robustly with the coalition Government.

The motion refers to making the opposition to welfare reforms the Executive's "highest priority". Is the SDLP seriously suggesting that jobs and skills be put on the back-burner? Surely that is the area that we need to focus on. I am sure that it will come as no surprise to Members that I think that our top priority should be creating a shared future. That would deliver efficiency, tackle deprivation, aid growth and build a strong economy that would ultimately deal more effectively with those dependent on welfare and the most vulnerable.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I want to speak up for young people, as well as families, the sick and those who are disabled. Welfare reform has adverse consequences for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable young people. Unemployment among young people is at a record high. Part of that has been driven by the global economic downturn, but it has also been driven by the policy of the Tory-led Government, who are determined to address their deficit by cutting back rather than by supporting growth. Against that background, it is particularly unhelpful to start treating those whose hopes and aspirations are being thwarted as feckless and irresponsible. However, I suppose that that is the assumption that underpins the British Government's work programme.

Their welfare reform, or cuts, forces young people on jobseeker's allowance to work for their benefit. Perhaps, some in the Chamber think that that can be no bad thing, and they, like the British Prime Minister, choose to pretend that youth unemployment has something to do with an inability to get out of bed in the morning, rather than admit that there is a real lack of job opportunities.

I am here to say that our young people deserve better. They deserve real training, value-added placements and a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. Unlike other initiatives designed to tackle youth unemployment, the work experience programme is predicated on coercion and sanction. The Government can dress it up in whatever fashion they want, but young people will face sanctions if they choose not to go on those placements. That policy has led to serious concerns about a breach of human rights legislation, and my understanding is that a legal challenge is under way on that very issue.

Ethical concerns about the programme recently led to a number of high-profile companies, which had been participating, pulling out. Sainsbury's and Waterstones were among some of the first to raise ethical concerns, followed by TK Maxx and Matalan, and Poundland is considering its position. TK Maxx has said that it does not support compulsory, non-paid

work experience. Charities such as Marie Curie Cancer Care have also withdrawn from the work programme on ethical grounds.

Not only are there serious ethical considerations, but there is also no evidence to suggest that the working-for-benefit programme acts as a pathway to work. The first set of statistics show that, since the scheme was introduced in Britain in May 2011, over 24,000 people have undertaken unpaid work under the mandatory work programme without any significant impact on the number unemployed. It is incumbent on the Assembly to want better and to do better for our young people. Unemployment among young people is not the only issue that is badly served by welfare reform. Changes in housing benefit will also impact adversely on young homeless people.

At my suggestion, the Committee for Social Development brought a prayer of annulment to the Assembly last year to challenge changes in the eligibility for single occupancy housing benefit. Sinn Féin spoke in that debate and highlighted the hardship that a single change in eligibility would create for 6,000 young people under the age of 35 already living in one-bedroom flats and facing a 50% reduction in housing benefit. The red herring of an increase in discretionary payments to help those affected needs to be nailed. It is difficult to get discretionary payments, and they last for only 13 weeks. Therefore, even if you are lucky to get those payments, it just suspends the inevitable, which is that you will have to top up your top-up.

At the time, MLAs did not endorse the Committee's concerns, but I hope that the Assembly might take the time to think again. We can dress it up in whatever fashion we like, but the facts are that welfare reform — it should be labelled welfare cuts — will have a devastating impact on many thousands of our constituents with benefit reductions. It also has the potential to make thousands of people homeless.

The future is bleak for those who are most in need in society. We have a responsibility to ensure that we are not found wanting in our efforts to lessen the impact that those cuts will have on communities.

Mr Beggs: I support the amendment in the name of Simon Hamilton and others. It is recognised that we need to reform our welfare system. The current system is not working, and I strongly believe that the payment of social security should incentivise and support people back into work, not penalise them on occasions for their efforts.

The present system and the current taxation system is so complicated that many people genuinely cannot work out whether it is worth their while gaining employment or working a few hours more because they could end up worse off.

In a related matter, I wish to put on record that I support the raising of the tax-free allowance so that people who earn less can take home more, and more people will see the benefits and advantages of working.

A fair weekly income is vital, but the issue is about much more than just a weekly income. Long-term welfare dependency can have serious adverse health effects on individuals. Their life expectancy is considerably lower, and it is important for the next generation to have a working role model in a household so that others are encouraged and see the

benefits of striving, working, holding down a job and doing better for themselves.

Mr McGlone: Thanks very much to the Member for giving way. Will he accept that it is not only people who are exclusively on social security benefits who will be affected by the changes but families who are in receipt of working tax credits? Some changes could lead to a reduction of as much as £4,000 a year for those families.

Mr Beggs: I fully accept that we have a complicated system of benefits and tax, which is bureaucratic and unclear, and we must create a system in which everyone knows that they are better off working. There have been failures in establishing the system that we have to date, and we must improve it. We must also protect and assist people who have disabilities.

Welfare reform must work in tandem with revitalising our economy, improving our education system and increasing early intervention so that opportunities will exist for all. We need a simpler system. At present, short-term employment can on occasions create difficulties for people, because the complexity of taking a job for a short time completely messes up their benefits and the money coming into a household, and it does not make sense to them to take up short-term employment. Therefore, it is important that we have a system that works and rewards people who decide to take on a few weeks' or months' work, which, hopefully, will lead to long-term work.

We have to acknowledge that welfare reform will have a very significant effect in Northern Ireland, because so many people have not worked for long periods and many are claiming income support. Furthermore, very large numbers are claiming unemployment benefit. That number rose to 61,500 last month, growing from 25,000 in 2006. Therefore, there are huge challenges. However, we must continue to try to encourage people and provide them with worthwhile opportunities to gain experience and to establish regular patterns of behaviour that help them to hold down long-term employment.

Some 14% of children in Northern Ireland are living in workless households. It is not good for children to live in that environment. We must create opportunities and more positive role models so that they can strive to improve.

There are changes coming in DLA, with the personal independence payments. I accept that there are huge concerns there, and I, too, have concerns. The vulnerable must be protected. However, I have a question regarding DLA. I have been aware of this issue for some time, but it has come to the public domain in recent times. Someone who is an alcoholic gets DLA. Is that person being helped or is their addiction being fed? Those questions must be asked. Our benefit system should be looking at how we can better assist such people by protecting and helping them, rather than simply feeding their addiction, which, on many occasions, makes the situation worse.

We need to alter what happens at present with social housing. Many families live in overcrowded conditions, as there are insufficient houses available for them to move to. However, other households may have changed, with family members having moved on, and there might be many vacant bedrooms in those homes. So I think it is right that we move towards changing, so that those who are living

in overcrowded conditions can be accommodated. That is appropriate.

It is important that housing benefit does not become a barrier to taking up employment and that the benefit trap that can exist is overcome. I know that many who start working for the first time cannot afford to have their own home. If they join with some friends to have a joint tenancy somewhere and to live independently —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Beggs: — surely they should not be disadvantaged, compared with someone who is reliant on benefits. There is a need for change, but we cannot afford to breach parity. Otherwise, it will be taken from our block grant.

Dr McDonnell: The Welfare Reform Bill is a “tsunami of cuts” and “a recipe for deprivation”. Those are not my words, but the words of Professor Eileen Evason, who is a respected expert and broadcaster on welfare matters. She made those comments when she addressed a conference that we held recently on welfare reform.

The SDLP is not in the business of scaremongering, as some have tried to accuse us. We are in the business of doing all that we can to protect hard-working families, the poor, the sick and those with disabilities. We recognise the need for a reform of the system, and we accept that, at times, it is abused by a very tiny minority of people. Abuse cannot be tolerated and should not be allowed to continue, but the answer is not to take a blunderbuss approach, such as the Tory-concocted legislation that is going through the House of Commons.

The Bill will not lift people out of poverty, and it will not lift people into work, as the Tories and the ‘Daily Mail’ would have us believe. The truth is that it will demoralise already vulnerable people, and push them further into poverty and deprivation and out to the margins of society.

In the past few days, the Institute for Fiscal Studies has demonstrated that a family with two children will be £580 a year worse off, and a couple with no children will be £100 a year worse off, as a result of changes in the child and working tax credit system.

As other Members have pointed out, women, children and those living with disability in Northern Ireland will be hardest hit.

4.00 pm

The issue that we face in the Bill, with its raft of welfare cuts, is that it does not offer a solution based on an analysis of any of the problems associated with the current social security system and economic environment. It is a package of cuts wrapped up in a populist “Make work pay” banner. Even that superficial mantra is flawed; to make work pay, there must be quality, decent paying jobs around. The SDLP is all about getting people back into work for the financial benefit, personal development and satisfaction it might bring them, but, as the recent unemployment figures from the Office for National Statistics show, the jobs are not out there for people at this time.

My limited time inhibits me from fully analysing all the flaws of the Bill. Others have highlighted the impact on mothers, especially those with babies, the impact on families, on those living with disability and on those with long-term

serious illness. I would like to focus briefly on the economic impact of the welfare cuts on Northern Ireland as a whole because they are wide-ranging. The cuts, taking into account inflation, will take some £450 million out of local purses and wallets, which means that that £450 million will be taken out of local retail tills. As we have discussed many times in the House, retailers and traders in towns, villages and cities across Northern Ireland are struggling to keep their doors open at the moment. The economic consequences do not end there. The cuts will detrimentally impact the number of business start-ups, a key objective of our Executive. It will be assumed under the new rules that an entrepreneur starting up a business is earning the national minimum wage and is therefore precluded from any entitlement to benefits while they try to get established. Starting up a business is initially costly and risky. Removing the safety net will act as a barrier to new business start-ups and entrepreneurs. I therefore appeal to our Executive, if they are serious and sincere about rebalancing our economy, supporting entrepreneurs, supporting SMEs —

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

Dr McDonnell: — eradicating child poverty and protecting the vulnerable in our society, to rigorously pursue every avenue of protection for Northern Ireland that they can in the Bill.

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): I welcome the opportunity to address the Assembly on the proposed welfare reforms and particularly to consider the issues highlighted in the motion and to outline how I see welfare reform being implemented in Northern Ireland. To put things in context, I advise Members that, as of this morning, the Welfare Reform Bill at Westminster had not completed its legislative passage and is now expected to gain Royal Assent by mid-March.

Members will be aware that the Welfare Reform Bill represents radical change to the existing welfare state. The changes are required for different reasons. The system has become increasingly complex both for people trying to claim benefits and for those who administer them. The system has evolved into something that it was never intended to become, and it acts as a disincentive for individuals to take up paid work. Thirdly, the system is not financially sustainable because costs have escalated significantly in the past decade. In bringing forward the Welfare Reform Bill, the coalition Government committed to reducing the complexity of the benefits system and to ensuring that it promotes personal responsibility and encourages those who can work to do so; supports vulnerable individuals who are unable to work; ensures that the system is fair both to those in work and those on benefits; and ensures that no individual is consigned to a life on benefits and that it always pays to work. That brief synopsis represents the basis for welfare reform. While we may not necessarily support all the proposals in the Westminster Bill, I doubt that any of us can find fault with the principles driving the need for reform.

Turning to today's motion, I am personally aware of the concerns that are being voiced with regard to the reforms. I will soon bring forward proposals for a Welfare Reform Bill in Northern Ireland. Within the context of the parity principle, I will seek to address those concerns by ensuring our particular circumstances in Northern Ireland are catered

for. It is important that Members understand that welfare reform is not only about changing the social security system but about changing a culture where some people make lifestyle choices to remain on benefits and to make little or no contribution to our society.

In Northern Ireland we have historically high levels of dependency on social security benefits. The number of people who are economically inactive in Northern Ireland is also higher than in any other region of the United Kingdom. The reasons for this are complex and long-standing. The reforms set out to tackle some of the key reasons why people remain on benefits rather than actively seeking work. If we are to achieve the long-term changes that we all wish to see in our society, we must recognise that we need to break intergenerational worklessness, create new role models in families and communities and break the cycle of benefit dependency.

Mr Byrne: Does the Minister accept that young people in the 18-24 age category are likely to have a severe cut in their housing benefit? Is it fair or just that that group of people should be so handicapped? In a recent answer, you said that 175 young people in Strabane would suffer and 155 in Omagh. Is that fair?

Mr McCausland: I ask the Member whether he can actually bear to listen to the entire analysis. One of the shortcomings that I detect in the SDLP and some of its more vocal exponents is that they are big on rhetoric and strong on denial. They live in a state of denial about the realities that we face. Perhaps if they were more constructive about what might be done, we as an Assembly might benefit from their support and advice.

Dr McDonnell: Will the Minister give way?

Mr McCausland: No, I will not give way. I have already given way once, and I will not give way again. It is important that Members from the SDLP actually listen and learn. As I have said to others in the House on occasions, people should bear it in mind that God gave us two ears and one mouth. I am sure that Alasdair McDonnell would benefit from that little piece of advice. Use them.

If we are to achieve the long-term changes that we all wish to see in our society, we must recognise that we need to break intergenerational worklessness, create new role models and break the cycle of dependency. This will be difficult and will require all of us in the Assembly to show leadership in supporting the measures necessary to achieve these important cultural and societal changes.

I mentioned the long-standing principle of parity. I think it incumbent on me as Minister for Social Development to remind Members what parity actually means in social security matters and how, in practice, the principle operates. In layman's terms, parity effectively dictates that an individual in Northern Ireland is entitled to and is paid the same level of social security benefits and is subject to the same conditions and sanctions as an individual elsewhere in the United Kingdom. In practice, this means that the United Kingdom Exchequer pays social security benefits to Northern Ireland recipients directly. For the 2010-11 financial year, Northern Ireland received £4.9 billion for social security and housing benefit purposes. That funding is not capped and is paid on the basis of needs or claims made. It is treated separately from the Northern Ireland

block grant. If the Assembly chooses not to bring in the reforms, any additional costs would have to be met by the Northern Ireland Executive. Perhaps at some point we will be told whether those cuts would come from the health budget, the education budget or whatever.

Since I became Minister for Social Development, one of my key priorities has been exploring with ministerial colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions the flexibilities that might be available in the welfare reform programme. I have been keen to understand those flexibilities to enable the Executive to carefully consider how the reforms can be shaped to meet Northern Ireland's specific needs. I have regular discussions and meetings with the key Ministers in the Department for Work and Pensions, including Lord Freud, who has overall responsibility for welfare reform, and Maria Miller, who is taking forward the changes to DLA and child maintenance. I am currently planning to meet Lord Freud next month to discuss the specific issues that will relate to Northern Ireland once the Welfare Reform Bill in Great Britain has received Royal Assent. That is one of the weaknesses in the SDLP motion, which

"calls on the Executive to make opposition ... their highest priority".

It says that as though that is not already the case. The motion also calls on the Executive to "immediately pursue robust negotiations" as though that is also not already the case. It also asked the Executive to:

"pursue all possible legal and operational flexibilities."

Those are things that we are already doing. They may not have featured on the SDLP's radar, that party may not have known of them, or they may have passed it by. However, the fact is that that is what we have been doing. That is why we have met Lord Freud, Maria Miller and others; that is why we have met the Secretary of State and asked him to use his influence with DWP; and that is why our officials are in daily contact with DWP. That happens because these are issues that we have been working on for quite some time. I have regular discussions on the matter, we are working on those things, and we will continue to do so. We will continue to do what we have been doing.

I note that an SDLP delegation also recently met Lord Freud to discuss its concerns. Welfare reform is one of the most important pieces of legislation in recent years, and it is essential that all political parties are fully engaged in understanding the details of the reforms and, within the principle of parity, put forward constructive ideas on how to shape and influence the legislation. Officials from my Department are working closely with those of the Department for Work and Pensions to shape how the reforms and the associated information technology systems are to be implemented. Part of that work is ensuring that Northern Ireland's specific needs are properly addressed. The work is progressing at a pace, given that the timescale for implementing many of the changes is during 2013. That reinforces my point and explains why it is important that all political parties positively engage in exploring and understanding Northern Ireland's needs.

The Executive have a real focus on delivering for the people of Northern Ireland and have set out their priorities in the Programme for Government. That includes a commitment to make changes to the welfare system not only because

of the parity principle but because we believe that there are aspects of the reforms that will make a positive contribution to Northern Ireland's long-term future. We have now established an Executive subcommittee on which all parties in the Executive are represented. Mark Durkan spoke of setting up an ad hoc Committee. We have an Executive subcommittee on which all parties are represented, and we have the work of the Committee for Social Development. So, the idea of a cross-departmental approach is already in operation. The committee has been tasked with developing an Executive response to welfare reform that is inclusive of how we can mitigate its negative aspects. It meets regularly — in fact, its next meeting is this afternoon — and it reports to the full Executive on key issues where it believes action will be required.

One of the key priorities for the Executive is tackling poverty in Northern Ireland. The introduction of universal credit is a reform that is focused on tackling one of the root causes of poverty. That benefit will help to get people back to work by ensuring that they are always better off in paid work than living on benefits. It simplifies the benefits system and ensures that, when people move into work or increase their hours at work, they are not penalised by losing the other benefits that they use to meet daily living expenses. It challenges families on benefits to take on the responsibilities and make the types of decision that working families encounter on a daily basis. It will be more expensive than the current system, but the longer-term gains are so important that the additional investment has been secured. Universal credit in Northern Ireland will put more money into people's pockets while protecting the most vulnerable and disadvantaged by ensuring that there are no losers when it is introduced. Universal credit will not solve the problems of poverty, but it gives us an important tool in the battle.

4.15 pm

Some critics have asked where the jobs are for the people who are moving onto the new work-focused regimes. That is a valid question, which I will address by pointing out that the reform of the welfare system will not happen overnight. Universal credit will take up to four years to implement. If we are to benefit from an upturn in the local economy, we need to ensure that we have a labour force that is skilled and committed to work. I appreciate the work that my Executive colleague Dr Stephen Farry is taking forward in DEL to help people into employment. The introduction of a work programme for Northern Ireland will be critical if we are to achieve the benefits from universal credit. I look forward to working with him on that important initiative.

We also need to recognise that many of the people who are economically inactive were not able to avail themselves of jobs when we had full employment and there were plenty of vacancies in the local economy. The reasons for that are complex, but there is no doubt that one of them was that the social security system ensured that they were better off out of work than in it. The reforms will tackle that perverse behaviour.

As Minister for Social Development, I am committed to having a social security system that has a real focus on protecting the vulnerable members of our society. I am also committed to taking forward real action to ensure that welfare reform is implemented, taking account of the circumstance of Northern Ireland and not just talking about it.

The motion rightly points out the high levels of disadvantage and refers to the high proportion of people in Northern Ireland on DLA. Nearly one in 10 of our population is on DLA, and in reforming the benefit we need to ensure that we provide positive support for people who will undergo the new assessment process. Where the motion fails, however, is that it does not recognise that the new benefit builds on DLA rather than dismantling it. The purpose of the new personal independence payment benefit is to ensure that only people who really need financial support receive it. The new benefit has many of the core principles that underpin DLA, such as providing financial support to people with a disability. It will be tax-free; it will be paid whether you are in or out of work; and it is a non-contributory benefit. My Department has ensured that the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland have been incorporated into the design of the new assessment process for PIR. Last summer, we piloted the new process with over 200 customers in Northern Ireland. That is real action being taken to address the consequences of the Welfare Reform Bill rather than just talking about the changes.

In recent months, my Department has been consulting political parties, the voluntary and community sector and the people of Northern Ireland on how we will replace the social fund when it is abolished in 2013.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister will draw his remarks to a close.

Mr McCausland: Last year, over 200,000 people in Northern Ireland turned to the social fund. That is one example of the sort of measure that can be considered. There has been significant commentary —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is up.

Mr McCausland: — on the issue of benefits. I assure Members that we are already doing all that we can, and we would welcome the support and help of others in that regard.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I will wind on our party's amendment, which adds to the SDLP motion. There are elements of the motion that may be repetitious or dealt with elsewhere. However, our party concurs with the broad sentiment of the motion.

I ask the SDLP to accept our amendment and other Members to support it. It adds a reality check to the motion in so far as the British Government have rejected all proposed changes thus far, even those from their own coalition partners never mind a whole range of other stakeholders, from church leaders to Members of this House who are also Members of that House. The British Government have rejected all notions of change so far, so I do not underestimate the uphill battle that there will be.

I listened to the Minister and have no doubt that his intentions are to mitigate the most negative aspects of the Welfare Reform Bill, as he will have to table it shortly in this House. By the same token, we wish to reject the DUP amendment for a simple reason. I accept entirely the sentiment of the amendment. However, in everything that I have heard in the past several months about welfare reform, everyone starts by saying they accept the principle of reform to simplify the system, and that is right. By the same token, however, that acceptance by a wide range of parties and organisations has been completely abused by

the current British Government because they will always say, "Yes, everybody welcomes simplifying the system". Certainly, we would, in principle. However, the Welfare Reform Bill put forward by the British Government has nothing to do with simplifying the system; it is about cutting the welfare budget. The British Government say that the social fund needs to be reformed, and the Department here is working through proposals to change that, which means a 10% top slice coming off the budget right away. We are told that we can do what we want with the social fund, so that is an issue where parity does not matter. I want to deal with parity a little more in a moment or two.

Having listened to a range of people over the past several months as Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development, I know that every organisation that came before the Committee told members about a litany of problems that will be faced by a lot of people whom all parties in the House represent. We have a duty to listen to those people.

I accept entirely that there are big issues around parity. I am not suggesting for one second that we just frivolously ignore those; I know that we cannot. We had the trade union NIPSA, for example, before the Committee the other week saying that it accepts parity "warts and all" on the basis that it is a big can of worms that cannot be opened. Its members will have to implement the changes when they come in even though they may not like it. However, that is the reality that we face. In proposing this amendment and supporting the SDLP motion, we are not suggesting that parity can be ignored. What we are saying is that we have choices, and we have to make choices.

I, like anybody else, can give anecdotes. I met a young person in Dunelm on Saturday afternoon working in a shop to get a few bob — to do what? Not to go out for the weekend or save up for Christmas but to get his fare to Australia. He is a young lad just after getting a university degree in Liverpool, and he and four of his mates are now saving up with weekend work to go away. It is a shame that our society, as a result of impositions from London, is getting our young kids skilled up and university educated to send them across the world to work. The big destination now is Australia.

We have choices to make. We cannot abolish parity but, as the Minister suggested, we need to look at parity and how the Department here, under our direct authority, could administer the system differently and more fairly. If needs be, we need to look at measures on which the Assembly is prepared to make informed decisions. It might cost us £10 million or £50 million, but let us at least have that debate. It is not fair to just say that it is parity and there is nothing we can do: there are things we can do. We may or may not be able to moderate the Bill coming from London. I am looking around the Chamber, and everybody who spoke in the debate said the same thing —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr A Maskey: They said that there are problems with the Welfare Reform Bill. What is critical is that we all work together to tackle the worst elements of that Bill —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is up.

Mr A Maskey: — to help the most vulnerable in our society. They are not all feckless, workless people.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is up, please.

Mr A Maskey: A lot of them are hard-working, well-educated people who are thrown on the dole queue in their tens and dozens every week.

Mr Douglas: We started today with our friend Alex Easton, who said that we all recognise the difficulties with the reforms proposed by the coalition Government. The Minister himself recognises that there are major problems and that we need to work together as an Executive to mitigate some of those difficulties coming down the track for us all. As Alex Easton said, we are in receipt of something like £5 billion from the Treasury annually by way of benefit payments, and that is expected to increase by 18% by 2015. I think we are all saying that there are problems not just in Northern Ireland or in the UK but right across Europe. So, how do we deal with that? The Bill is coming down the track and, unless we prepare for it now, we will have major problems right across the United Kingdom.

As my friend Alex Easton said, we need to continue, not start. The Minister made a good point about that today. That is one of the problems that we have with the motion. A lot of work has gone on, and the Minister has worked extremely well to try to deal with some of the issues. He met a range of Ministers, and officials are meeting officials from the Department for Work and Pensions. We are in daily contact with our officials here and, at one of the meetings, I asked about the whole notion of parity. The Chairperson of the Committee will agree with that. We were told that we could lose between £4 billion and £5 billion. Therefore, if we are going to push the parity line, we need to see whether it will cost us that. According to the facts and figures, it definitely will.

Alex Easton referred to the tone of the SDLP motion and the suggestion that not enough was being done. We are doing all that we can in the areas that I have outlined.

Mr F McCann: There are a number of things in what you said. First, at every meeting over the past two and a half years since welfare reform was first discussed, when parity came up, officials said that the cost would be £8 billion, £5 billion, £400 million, £50 million, and then £12 million. We have never had concrete figures. Most of the assumptions made by officials have been to scare us into making decisions that would not run against parity.

Mickey Brady and I have been at public meetings organised by people in the community sector. One of the really frightening things is that most people do not know what is coming at them. Most people do not know what the cuts will mean. When you speak to people —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. That is a very long intervention.

Mr F McCann: It is. I am glad that you stopped me there. However, my point is that we need to get the message out there so that people understand what is coming at them.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member will be pleased to know that he has an extra minute.

Mr Douglas: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I have about six pages here. The point is well made. These debates are about discussing the issues in an open and frank manner.

Mark Durkan made the strong point about the wider implication for businesses, which was that money would not circulate as a result of the cuts. I think that Alex Maskey referred to that as well. However, as the Minister said, this will not happen overnight. Welfare reform will take at least four years. At least we have four years to try to plan, to encourage people into employment and to encourage the sustainability of Northern Ireland.

Mickey Brady, a colleague on the Social Development Committee, mentioned the D-word: demonisation. He made a strong point that came up in Committee. He felt that this was about Tory cuts and about Tories attacking the most vulnerable. He highlighted the effect on people with disabilities and said that they were some of the poorest in society. I concur with that. The Minister agreed that there are vulnerable people out there. Therefore, in terms of the Welfare Reform Bill and these interventions, we will have to work hard and be as honest as possible in order to try to subvert some of this and defend the most vulnerable in our community.

Michael Copeland sought an assurance that the Minister would look at some of the contentious issues, and the Minister has given us that assurance today. Those of us who work in the communities with the most vulnerable — the long-term unemployed or whatever —

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

Mr Douglas: We see that on a daily basis. I support amendment No 1.

4.30 pm

Ms Ritchie: If you listened to the debate across the piece, you will know that there were 11 participants and about five interventions from Members. There is absolutely no doubt that, as my colleagues Dr Alasdair McDonnell and Mark Durkan said, the proposals being brought forward by the coalition Government in the Welfare Reform Bill, and, if not changed, the universal credit Bill when it comes to the Assembly, will lead to some of the most significant and detrimental changes to welfare reform and impact in a very detrimental way on the money available to the most vulnerable people, the people at the bottom in our society. It will deepen poverty. It will increase levels of fuel poverty, because people will have less income with which to purchase fuel. In Northern Ireland, there is a lower level of wages and less access to purchasing power. All in all, the proposals will be detrimental and will prove quite devastating. As Professor Eileen Evason said, they are a tsunami of cuts that are going to come down and probably undermine and wash many people away.

Therefore, in assessing what Members said, I was quite taken aback at some of the contributions. For example, Alex Easton spent the first six minutes undermining and involving himself in political point scoring against — catcalling, in many ways — the SDLP. I can tell you that it was the SDLP that warned about the welfare reform proposals. It was the SDLP that, when in the Department for Social Development, went, several years ago, to several British Government Ministers in the Department for Work and Pensions about flexible arrangements that could be introduced in relation to other matters. In fact, it was my colleague Alex Attwood, last year, who opened the discussions with Lord Freud about

possible mitigation measures that could be brought about to prevent deepening levels of disadvantage and deprivation. That is what we should have been hearing about today, rather than the fact that you are going to meet Lord Freud. We actually have done that —

Mr McCausland: So have I, if you would only bother listening here.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. No shouting across the Chamber.

Ms Ritchie: I was slightly confused about the position of Michael Copeland and his colleague Roy Beggs. Do they support welfare reform? We all support the principle of getting people back into work. However, some people in this Chamber have failed to recognise that there are not the work opportunities available to people. We must recognise and acknowledge that. That is why the SDLP is asking for a special ad hoc Committee to deal with welfare reform. It is only by detailed scrutiny of the legislation and working directly with British Government Ministers that we will be able to try to provide and make sure that there are mitigation measures. I still ask the Minister to deal with those issues.

Mickey Brady, Fra McCann and Alex Maskey indicated that they support the principle of helping those who are most in need. I hope that they will be able to join us in the Lobbies this evening and support our motion.

Mr A Maskey: I appreciate that the Member has limited time. I do not want to do a Fra McCann and eat up all your time, but let me just make this point. In my comments this afternoon, I tried to get Members across all the parties to unite on the issue. I could have attacked your party, and said that you stood in the Chamber as Minister seeking accelerated passage because you did not want to breach parity, but let us work together on this. Let us not try to score points, because I think that your party might be a little bit more vulnerable. I have said very clearly that we do support your motion, warts and all. We support the motion, but reject the DUP's amendment. We support our amendment, which adds benefit to your motion. Let us work together on what we can agree on. Let us not score points; it is too important.

Ms Ritchie: I was quite clear that the purpose of the ad hoc Committee is for Members from all parties in the House to work together to tackle the main problems in the welfare reform proposals; deal with draft legislation line by line; provide the required scrutiny; and, above all, act against the measures coming down the line that will impact detrimentally on all families, young people, elderly people and people with disabilities across the spectrum in Northern Ireland. Sometimes, people want to listen only to what they think that they want to hear.

Mr Humphrey: Will the Member give way?

Ms Ritchie: No. I will not give way. I will continue.

There were absolutely spurious arguments from the Minister for Social Development, who said that there will be an increase in spending on benefits. I challenge that. There have been numerous spurious claims that the level of spending on benefits is set to increase steadily in the North in the period ahead. Indeed, a figure of 18% has been mentioned. Nowhere has that argument been advanced

more spuriously or furiously than by the Minister of Finance and Personnel himself, Sammy Wilson. The truth is that that figure is derived mainly from inflation and some fanciful projections of demand for universal credit that are based on a Treasury view from the south-east of England.

Mr McGlone: I thank the Member for raising that detail. In fact, the aim of the proposals being rubber-stamped by the Minister is to reduce DLA by 20%. At a briefing from officials the other day, we were told that DLA will be reduced by £160 million. That affects 37,000 people. That is what we face. It is about time that the Assembly had a reality check, which is why we propose to incorporate all parties in an ad hoc working group to go through those reforms meticulously line by line.

Ms Ritchie: I thank my colleague Mr McGlone for his intervention. When all is said and done, the SDLP motion says that the Executive must oppose Tory welfare reform measures as their number one priority. However, the DUP amendment says that the Assembly should not oppose them. That is implicit to a certain degree. I challenge Mr Maskey on that. If he were really explicit, he would say that his party is coming out to support the SDLP motion. Sinn Féin is saying that, although it shares some SDLP concerns —

Mr A Maskey: Will the Member give way?

Ms Ritchie: I will not give way at the moment. I will come back to that. Sinn Féin is saying that, although it shares some SDLP concerns about welfare reform, it will not stand up for the victims of that reform. If Mr Maskey is saying that he will now support the SDLP motion, I accept that.

Let us be clear: if you support the DUP amendment, you are saying that you will not stand up for people in greatest need. The Minister can laugh, but only the SDLP motion promises to stand up for those at the bottom. Although Sinn Féin now says that it will support my party's motion, its amendment simply blames the Brits. My party is saying that the Assembly must stand up to London. We have stood up to London before. The DUP refused to accept the devolution of policing and justice until London stumped up a decent budget for it. We, rightly, united to demand hundreds of millions of pounds for the beleaguered members of the Presbyterian Mutual Society and forced London to help. Recently, we argued about the unfair impact of air passenger duty in the North. Again, we forced London to help.

There we have it. The DUP will fight London over prisons and money for prison staff, pensioners in the Presbyterian Mutual Society and air passengers. However, it will not lift a hand to help people in need or people who need help most — those at the bottom of the welfare system. Frankly, that is a disgrace. The Assembly has an opportunity to stand up for the most vulnerable; the people who rely on it most. The SDLP says, "Do the right thing. Support people at the bottom of the system. Support our motion."

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before I put the Question on amendment No 1, I advise Members that, if it is made, I will not put the Question on amendment No 2, as the wording to which it relates will have been deleted. I hope that is clear.

Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 44; Noes 44

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Beggs, Ms P Bradley, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Douglas and Mr G Robinson.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Ms M Anderson, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Mr Doherty, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Byrne and Mrs McKeivitt.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question put, That amendment No 2 be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 44; Noes 45.

AYES

Ms M Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Mr Doherty, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Brady and Mr A Maskey.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Beggs, Ms P Bradley, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea,

*Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen,
Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow,
Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend,
Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr
Wilson.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr Douglas and
Mr G Robinson.*

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 38; Noes 44

AYES

*Mr Agnew, Ms M Anderson, Mr Attwood,
Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne,
Mr W Clarke, Mr Doherty, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D
Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch,
Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy,
Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell,
Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay,
Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan,
Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey,
Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr P
Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.*

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Byrne and Mrs McKeivitt.

NOES

*Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Beggs,
Ms P Bradley, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke,
Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson,
Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott,
Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan,
Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr
Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr
McClarty, Mr B McCrea,
Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen,
Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow,
Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend,
Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr
Wilson.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr Douglas and
Mr G Robinson.*

Main Question accordingly negatived.

Adjourned at 5.18 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 21 February 2012

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Executive Committee Business

Marine Bill: First Stage

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I beg to introduce the Marine Bill [NIA Bill 5/11-15], which is a Bill to provide for marine plans in relation to the Northern Ireland inshore region; to provide for marine conservation zones in that region; to make further provision in relation to marine licensing for certain electricity works in that region; and for connected purposes.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

Budget Bill: Further Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: I call on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to move the Further Consideration Stage of the Budget Bill.

Moved. — [Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]

Mr Speaker: As no amendments have been tabled, there is no opportunity to discuss the Budget Bill today; Members will be able to have a debate at Final Stage. Further Consideration Stage of the Bill is, therefore, concluded. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Official Statistics Order (Northern Ireland) 2012

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I beg to move

That the Official Statistics Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 be affirmed.

Members, the Order that comes under your consideration today is part of a wider programme of work implementing the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007.

The aforementioned Act established an independent United Kingdom statistics authority to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics. The Act defines official statistics as those produced by Government Departments and associated Crown bodies. The legislation also allows the scope of official statistics to be expanded by the introduction of an order specifying statistics produced by certain persons as being official statistics.

The Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 created a new non-ministerial Department, the Statistics Board, which operates under the name UK Statistics Authority, to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. The Act extends to Northern Ireland. Under section 6(1)(a) of the Act, all statistics produced by Government Departments, the Scottish Administration, a Welsh ministerial authority, a Northern Ireland Department and other Crown bodies are designated as official statistics.

Sections 6(1)(b) and 6(2) of the Act allow orders to be made by a Minister of the Crown, Scottish Ministers, Welsh Ministers or a Northern Ireland Department to specify other persons as producers of official statistics. The UK Statistics Authority is required to monitor the production and publication of official statistics and to report relevant concerns to the person responsible for those statistics as defined in section 8 of the Act. At the request of the appropriate authority, which is defined in section 12(7), the UK Statistics Authority must assess and determine whether the code of practice for statistics has been compiled in relation to any official statistics and, if so, to designate those statistics as national statistics.

The designation as official statistics has a number of impacts on producers of statistics. First, the production and publication of the official statistics is subject to monitoring and reporting by the UK Statistics Authority. Secondly, the persons producing official statistics that have not been designated as national statistics are, as a matter of good

practice, expected to comply with the standards in the UK Statistics Authority code of practice for official statistics, which sets out the procedures that must be followed in producing and publishing national statistics. Official statistics designated as national statistics require the producers of those statistics to fully comply with the code in order to maintain that designation. Thirdly, the persons producing official statistics must comply with the relevant rules and principles relating to the granting of pre-release access to official statistics as applicable to them and, in relation to the official statistics designated as national statistics, must do so as if these rules and principles are part of the code of practice. Lastly, the person responsible for any official statistics in respect of which an assessment has been made under section 12 of the Act must provide the UK Statistics Authority with such information about the statistics as it may require.

The benefits of being designated a producer of official statistics include a recognised status for the statistics that are produced. It also signals to Government, the Assembly and other users that the statistics are produced to appropriate standards, and it raises the profile of statistics and the importance of quality within the organisation. Furthermore, it clarifies the importance of the statistics for policy use, and it confirms the authoritative nature of the figures.

The Act allows any Minister to bring forward an official statistics order. However, in the interests of making most efficient use of parliamentary time, the Cabinet Office Minister brought forward the UK order on behalf of all Government Departments. In the case of Northern Ireland, I have brought forward the legislation, as Minister with responsibility for statistics.

The proposed order applies wholly to Northern Ireland devolved statistics, as defined under section 66(4) of the Act. With the agreement of the Cabinet Office, four criminal justice bodies previously listed in the Official Statistics Order 2010, which was brought forward by the Cabinet Office, will now be included in the Northern Ireland order to reflect their devolved status. Targeted consultation was carried out with the bodies included in the order. That was undertaken by senior departmental statisticians who consulted directly with bodies sponsored by their Department.

As required by the Act, the UK Statistics Authority was consulted on the draft order. Ministers were briefed on bodies included from their respective areas, and they are content.

The bodies included in the order are as follows: Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute; Arts Council of Northern Ireland; Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland; Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment; Livestock and Meat Commission for Northern Ireland; Northern Ireland Cancer Registry at Queen's University, Belfast; Northern Ireland Housing Executive; Northern Ireland Library Authority, Northern Ireland Policing Board; Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland; Probation Board for Northern Ireland; Regional Business Services Organisation; Sport Northern Ireland; and Regional Agency for Public Health and Social Well-being.

The order was considered by the Committee for Finance and Personnel, and no objections were raised. I, therefore, recommend that the Official Statistics Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 be affirmed.

Mr Murphy (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I will not go over what the Minister outlined. His speech held the Chamber in such rapt attention that there is no point in my repeating it. The Committee, as the Minister stated, considered the proposal to make the order at its meeting on 26 October 2011 and had no objection to the policy proposals at that time. The formal statutory rule, which is before the Assembly today, was considered at the Committee's meeting on 1 February 2012, together with the accompanying report from the Assembly's Examiner of Statutory Rules. The Committee agreed to recommend that the Official Statistics Order (NI) 2012 be affirmed by the Assembly. I, therefore, support the motion.

Mr Cree: It is hard to follow that exciting subject. Is the Minister satisfied that all relevant statistics have been covered?

Mr Wilson: I thank Members for the part that they played in this stimulating debate. Obviously, it has generated wide interest in the Assembly. I welcome Members' remarks and, indeed, the help of the Chairman and members of the Finance and Personnel Committee in carrying out the scrutiny of the order.

In answer to Mr Cree's question, there were extensive discussions with all Departments. We looked at the bodies that are associated with Departments and produce statistics that we deem to be official. All but two of those consulted agreed to be included in the order. Translink and the Equality Commission were the only bodies that decided not to be included in the order at present. However, as I said, there is provision for the list to be extended, and I hope that, eventually, both organisations will come in under the umbrella of the order.

Those were all the issues raised. Therefore, I thank Members for their support and commend the motion to the Assembly.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Official Statistics Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 be affirmed.

Private Members' Business

Indigenous Fish Stocks

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has allowed one hour and 30 minutes for this debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Swann: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes that a number of indigenous fish species, including salmon, are being exploited by both legal and illegal fishing to the point where stocks are no longer sustainable; calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in partnership with other relevant Departments and following consultation with key stakeholders, to develop an action plan, which includes actions required by the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization, to improve the sustainability of relevant fish stocks in the forthcoming and subsequent seasons; and further calls on the Minister to work in partnership with all relevant stakeholders to deliver the action plan.

10.45 am

I thank the Business Committee for giving us the time to debate this important issue. This debate is timely, given the recent work in the Committee, the Minister's statements and petitions, letters and lots of lobbying across the country. There are many people who have welcomed the debate, especially those who recognise the serious risk to many fish species in Northern Ireland waters.

Although there has been much focus on the plight of the salmon, it is clear that it is not alone in being taken to the point of extinction. Some may see today's debate and the measures being introduced by the Minister as signs of victory; they are not. It is a disgrace that we as a society have come to the point where we have to debate how close to extinction we are taking salmon or how much we are decimating daggan, pike, pollan and a host of other fish.

In bringing this debate forward, we in the Ulster Unionist Party want to ensure that after today no one is left in any doubt that it is due to the actions of some and the inaction of others that this debate is necessary. We will highlight how we have come to this desperate situation. My party colleagues Sandra Overend and Danny Kinahan, who have both invested a lot of time in this cause, will further develop the debate to highlight the ecological, environmental and conservational aspects and the missed potential and wasted opportunity through angling tourism in Northern Ireland, which is as important.

I start, not by talking about salmon or nets, as some might have thought I would, but by highlighting the status of another of our iconic species: the Lough Neagh eel. The Lough Neagh eel was awarded the much sought after protected geographical indication status. However, behind that good-news story is the fact that the Lough Neagh eel is under severe threat.

Climate change and other factors far outside the control of this Administration have brought us to the point where the eel population is no longer sustainable. Only by direct

intervention, through stocking, and a comprehensive eel management plan overseen by Europe does that fishery still exist. However, that may change, because if the eel management plan does not improve the situation, we may be back here considering the future of that fishery. That is one of the reasons why the entire Lough Neagh eco system is so important. Officials have told us that 20% of the fished biomass can be harvested from Lough Neagh and still leave a sustainable fishery. The problem is that they do not know the starting point, and they can only guess what is being harvested.

In the last financial year, Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) bailiffs found 45,000 metres of illegal nets in Lough Neagh. To give Members some idea of what distance that makes up, it would be the same as running an illegal net from Belfast City Hall to Ballymena town hall. Those are monofilament nets that the fish cannot see, can catch tonnes of fish at a time and cost only a few pounds. That is not a sport, nor is it culture or someone's tradition; it is criminal, and it must be ended. We know that we have a problem in Lough Neagh: we do not know the scale, but an intense effort by the relevant bodies is required to establish a baseline for all the species in the system.

I know that the Minister and others would be disappointed if I did not raise the plight of the salmon. In the Minister's own words:

"Wild Atlantic salmon are in decline, and face the very real threat of extinction. The combined weight of scientific evidence, coupled with the possibility of heavy European fines, shows that continued exploitation of this species – for commercial or leisure purposes – is unsustainable."

However, there is confusion, which the Minister must clear up today with simple, explicit and clear language. I ask the same question as I did yesterday: will she confirm that all DCAL waters and derelict waters will have a mandatory catch-and-release policy this season?

Like the situation with the eels, we did not arrive at this point because of a few nets off the coast or a few anglers catching and killing salmon in our rivers; we are here because of the breakdown in the salmon ecosystem. Once, 30% of salmon that left our rivers returned; now less than 5% do so. That is barely sustainable. Take out the number that are caught, and the salmon will be extinct from our waters in a few years' time.

It is our duty to ensure that we in this place influence the factors that we can influence so that we do not drive the salmon population to the same extreme as that of our eels. Just as a few are asked not to net salmon, many thousands of anglers understand that circumstances may dictate that they will never be able to catch and kill a salmon from our rivers again. I have no doubt that the Minister will continue to be lobbied by those with different views, just as previous Ministers were.

It was reported in the 'News Letter' on 8 October 2008:

"I am told on good authority that the netsmen are quietly confident that Mr Campbell will rule in their favour. A formidable delegation from the netsmen to the Minister a fortnight ago was led by Ian Paisley Jr and included North Antrim businessman Seymour Sweeney. They do not expect a decision for some months but they are

reasonably confident that their views will prevail and the netsmen will be back in business next year and in succeeding years."

Therefore, Minister, another point that requires clarification is exactly with whom responsibility lies for licences for nets off the coast. Officials told the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure last week that they cannot issue them. In a press release on Friday evening, however, the Minister said that the decision had not yet been taken. Will she clarify when she will make the final announcement so that everyone, including the individuals who applied for net licences, can know where they stand?

Mr O'Loan, when in this place, lobbied for the netsman, as did Mr McKay. They argued for the rights of those who hold licences to take fish. Even when told of the perilous status of the species, it appears that people seek to uphold an absolute right to net the last salmon returning to our rivers. They are not alone. There are those who fish with rod and line who likewise consider that they have the right to take and kill the last salmon returning to our rivers. However, many more enjoy the sport but respect the fact that it is nature's bounty and not man's, and it must be protected.

We hear much about rights across all areas of government on a wide range of topics. Some will seek to make this about rights, but it is not. It is about responsibility — the responsibility to introduce measures that ensure that we pass on to future generations an environment in better condition than that in which we received it.

For those who have heard but still do not understand, listen to the words of a Cree proverb:

"Only when the last tree has died and the last river been poisoned and the last fish been caught will we realise we cannot eat money."

To clarify, those are the Cree Indians, not Leslie Cree.

There is a saying that success has many fathers but failure is an orphan. Many groups want to be the fathers of the fact that the issue is now so high up the agenda. I am not one of those fathers. Rather, I am more of a midwife bringing the issue to the fore in the Chamber and in Committee. Like a good midwife, however, I will say to all the fathers that the hard work is only beginning and your responsibilities far outweigh your rights.

Miss M McIlveen (The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure): As Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, I welcome the opportunity to speak in this important debate and to support the motion.

I will outline some of the discussions that the Committee has had on the conservation of indigenous fish species, particularly salmon. On 12 January 2012, the Committee took evidence from the Ulster Angling Federation. At its most recent meeting, on 16 February, it received briefings from the Department on its efforts to conserve indigenous fish species and from the North Atlantic Wild Sea Salmon Fishermen's Association (NAWSSFA).

The motion calls on the Minister, in partnership with other relevant Departments and in consultation with key stakeholders, to develop an action plan in line with the

actions required by the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization (NASCO) to improve the sustainability of relevant fish stock.

The Committee heard that the European eel stock and wild Atlantic sea salmon are in decline. The eel stock has been in decline since around 1980 and shows no sign of recovery. A number of causes for the decline have been suggested, such as oceanic climate changes, habitat loss, predation, over-exploitation, pollution and parasites. In 2007, the European Commission adopted European eel regulations to establish measures for the recovery of eel stock. The Department set out its plans for conserving eels in three eel management plans that were agreed by the European Commission in March 2010. The Committee understands that the Department will review those plans later this year to ensure that the measures are effective. The Committee looks forward to hearing the outcome of the review.

The Committee is in no doubt that measures must be taken to preserve salmon stocks, as recent scientific evidence suggests that the wild Atlantic salmon is under threat of extinction. The Committee recognises that there are a number of reasons for the decline in salmon but that the main cause is oceanic ecological changes, resulting in low marine survival.

Nonetheless, the Department has asked recreational and commercial fishermen to do their part to halt the exploitation of salmon during the 2012 season by agreeing to voluntary conservation measures in the short term, which will allow the Department time to consult on options to preserve the species.

The Department has told the Committee that, if DCAL does not take urgent action to address the exploitation of salmon, there is a risk that it will be in breach of the EC habitats directive and may be subject to significant infraction fines of up to £350,000 a day. Therefore, doing nothing is not an option.

The Committee believes that the preservation of salmon is paramount. Nonetheless, it appreciates that salmon conservation is a complex and emotive issue, with opposing stakeholder views on the way forward. Therefore, the Committee recognises the significant challenge facing the Department. However, it is imperative that the Department manages these matters sensitively and effectively.

Anglers wish to retain their right to fish recreationally and to further develop the tourism strand of angling. On the other hand, netsmen wish to preserve their long tradition for nets fishing. However, both groups recognise that conservation measures must be taken to ensure the sustainability of salmon stock in the long term. The Department must engage in meaningful dialogue with all stakeholders to try to secure their buy-in to the voluntary proposals and to agree on the way forward.

The Committee has heard that the Department cannot issue licences to the netsmen, as that would be in breach of the EC habitats directive. The Committee is aware that, ultimately, the decision now resides with the Minister, and it has written to her to ensure that she has a sound and legal basis, should she take that course of action. The Committee also asked the Minister that all measures be explored in a timely, effective and robust manner to ensure that the European Commission does not levy infraction fines on us. The Committee fully understands the wider implications on

public services if that were to occur. Further, the Committee has called on the Minister to ensure that all stakeholders in the process are treated equitably and that the conservation measures adopted by the Department are fair, balanced, enforceable, open and transparent.

The Committee understands that the Department will commission research on the stock of other fish species to advise on wider policy and conservation measures. The Committee welcomes that approach and looks forward to hearing the outworkings of that research. I support the motion.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith míle agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Beidh mé ag labhairt ar son an rúin inniu. Thank you. I will speak in favour of the motion.

Over the past few weeks and months, members of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure have been lobbied and presented with a number of opinions as to the future of fish stock, in particular, the Atlantic salmon, which year-on-year and for generations have battled up our rivers to spawn and procreate. That wonder of nature never ceases to amaze and inspire us all. However, it is obvious to all of us and, in particular, to anglers who have witnessed it at first hand, that the salmon population in our rivers is in serious decline. Indeed, as a lifelong angler in both sea and game modes, I have seen the gradual demise of the salmon stocks throughout the 1980s and 1990s. In the years since, that has been followed by a much more serious and, some might say, terminal decline in fish numbers. That is a major challenge for us all. The strategy that NASCO adopted some years ago was intended to halt the falling numbers, but still they continue to fall.

The fact is that there is no simple solution to the issue, and there are competing and various theories as to how best to approach the matter. There is a raft of reasons for that, and it is easy to point fingers of blame at others. The trials and tribulations of the salmon are many and must be addressed. Those include the destruction of redds through gravel extraction; the needs of habitat enhancement; the removal of traps, groynes and barriers in rivers; the potential introduction of catch-and-release schemes; the reduction of pollution and eutrophication; the removal of escapee fish; and poaching. They also include hydroelectric schemes in rivers; effective management of inshore netting; enforcement on the high seas feeding ground; and last but not least, although some may not agree, a cognisance of climate change and of the shift in oceanic currents. That list is not exhaustive, and exploitation in all its forms must be halted. Recent scientific evidence also points to a decline in natural marine survival.

Therefore, all that points to the need for a collective approach to ensure the survival of the Atlantic salmon.

The Minister asked commercial netmen not to reapply for their licences and recreational anglers to adopt a voluntary catch-and-release policy. In many rivers, including my own, the River Roe in County Derry, responsible and concerned anglers have already unofficially adopted a catch-and-release policy. They must rightly be commended for that.

11.00 am

The half dozen active nets off the north coast and County Down may not be issued with licences this year, but is that enough? We are told that there are 275 active inshore nets

in England and Wales and 50 in Scotland. This question must arise: are those nets catching Irish fish, and do those fish come from rivers in SACs in Ireland, thus breaching article 6 of the EU habitats directive regarding mixed bag fish, which is the reason that the nets have been suspended?

We must stop killing salmon and, indeed, other endangered species if there is ever to be a recovery in numbers. Pollan, eels and dollaghan are all getting to critical mass for survival in fresh water. Indeed, the humble trout is no longer as prolific as it once was. At sea, the Atlantic cod is, for many, a scarce commodity. The time has come for all those with an interest in the preservation of our indigenous fish species to come together and work for the benefit and enhancement of our rivers, lakes and waterways. Perhaps a single agency such as DEFRA, as witnessed elsewhere, might be a more prudent way of dealing with all waterways issues, rather than having input from the plethora of agencies that we have at the minute: DCAL, DOE, DARD, the Rivers Agency, the NIEA, NI Water and Waterways Ireland, to name but a few. That does not take into account the riparian owners or, indeed, the absentee landlords who extract tax and contribute very little to the upkeep and enhancement of our rivers and loughs. I am thinking particularly of a small club on the River Bann, which contributes somewhere in the region of £8,000 per annum among 30 members.

Angling is the world's number one pastime and contributes greatly to the economy and the tourism product here. Without fish, that will simply be no more, and future generations should never forgive us for our neglect. A Cheann Comhairle, I support the motion.

Mrs McKeivitt: In a previous life, before I entered this Chamber, I was a councillor in Newry and Mourne. We received numerous representations from local fishing clubs on helping to preserve endangered species of fish. Top of that list were concerns about the dwindling number of salmon, unable to make their way back to their birthplace to spawn. To highlight the issue and help promote healthy rivers, many of my colleagues and I took up the invitation to join local club members in stocking the rivers with thousands of trout and salmon fry. We were also involved in a project to reintroduce pearl mussels to fresh water.

As you will be aware, Mr Speaker, Northern Ireland's longest river, the Bann, rises in the Mournes above the Spelga reservoir, flows down through Hilltown to Banbridge and Portadown into Lough Neagh and into the Atlantic Ocean at Portstewart. Thousands of keen anglers along the route of the Bann and every other river across Ireland are owed a debt of gratitude for the manner in which they maintain our riverbeds and banks, try to maintain stocks and, indeed, provide valuable advice to us politicians. It should also be noted that they do that voluntarily, not because they are remunerated but because they are passionate about the environment of our rivers and preserving stocks.

This issue is one of the most concerning that I have had to deal with since taking my seat on the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee. We have heard from representative groups, not least the Ulster Angling Federation, which has challenged DCAL policy and the European Union environment directive in Brussels. It did not do so lightly but made it very clear that, for a good number of years, it was not receiving the support from DCAL that it should have been receiving. Its major concerns simply received lip service. I realise

that not all the blame can be pointed at DCAL, but it is the Department that issues licences and is, therefore, pivotal in ensuring that our obligations under the EC habitats directive and the NASCO protocols are implemented. DOE, DARD, the Loughs Agency, the Rivers Agency and other key stakeholders have a role, and the motion calls on the Minister to bring all interested parties to the table to develop and deliver an action plan.

Illegal activity must be strongly tackled — excuse the pun. In its area of jurisdiction, the Loughs Agency has seized a substantial number of nets, boats and cars. DCAL needs to get up to speed in dealing with illegal trade. If more resources are needed, they must be provided.

I fully support the motion and emphasise the speed at which things must be progressed. We cannot afford to let stocks dwindle any further. We certainly cannot afford the penalties that might be applied by Europe. Having said that, after receiving a briefing from DCAL officials last Thursday and having listened to representations from netmen, I have grave concerns about how the issue has been dealt with. I ask the Minister to meet that group as soon as possible.

Mr McCarthy: I thank Robin Swann, Danny Kinahan and Sandra Overend for bringing this important motion to the Assembly. I welcome the opportunity to speak on the matter. We cannot ignore the decline of indigenous fish stocks. I support the motion's call for an action plan. I also welcome the call to work with all relevant stakeholders in the formation and delivery of that plan. It is vital that all stakeholders are involved in it. The key point that we must bear in mind throughout the debate is that everyone from the Department to local anglers should be involved. All of them would like to halt the decline in fish numbers and see a return to sustainable fishing.

It is regrettable that current policies are failing to prevent the decline in numbers of north Atlantic salmon in particular. Recent scientific data also suggest that, without immediate and effective action, we could be heading for infraction fines for being in contravention of the EU habitats directive. That reminds me of a few weeks ago, when the Assembly talked about the modiolus in Strangford lough and the possibility of infraction fines. Let us hope that we can do something to improve the situation in both areas. In light of that, it is essential that the Minister and her Department take swift action to produce an overarching plan that identifies effective ways to address the issue. As the motion states, it is essential that the drafting of the action plan should involve close consultation with all the main stakeholders and experts. Not only will that ensure that the process is inclusive, it will harness the full knowledge that is available. That takes on added significance because, as far as I am aware, the decline in salmon stocks, particularly during their time at sea, is not fully understood. Although it is easy to blame overfishing as the sole cause for stock depletion, it must also be noted that climate change is thought to play a significant role. For example, rising sea surface temperatures and the subsequent scarcity of food is thought to impact on the number of salmon at sea. Nonetheless, that serves only to highlight the scale of the challenge and the need for immediate action.

The Minister and her Department must take a robust lead and see through the successful implementation of the action plan. I am sure that she will. Again, that must involve

the inclusion and co-operation of all relevant stakeholders and experts. The need for a holistic and inclusive approach to that must not be underestimated. The Alliance Party is happy to support the motion. It is a fact that further insufficient action will simply not be enough. The Minister must lead the way in drawing together all those who are in a position to see a return to sustainable numbers. I support the motion.

Mr Irwin: This issue has generated a lot of concern among the fishing fraternity. The matter has been raised with me on a number of occasions by local anglers and, indeed, anglers from other constituencies. The main area of concern is, obviously, the sustainability of north Atlantic salmon. Indeed, there are real fears about current levels of the species. We know that the Department has been monitoring the situation for some time. Statistics were recorded at Bushmills salmon station that point to a steady decline in returning salmon from 30% in 1997 to fewer than 5% today. That is, obviously, a cause for considerable concern. I agree fully with the motion's call for the need to look at the issue.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Member for giving way. He referred to the salmon stock prior to 1997, which was around 30%. Today, it has declined to around 5%. It raises this question: what has the Department been doing? I know that the present Minister was not in place in 1997, but what has happened between 1997 and today? Is it not ironic that we are begging for action to be taken on a voluntary basis, despite the fact that we have the Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1966? That legislation seems to be inadequate. Why is there no legislation to deal with the present decline in salmon stocks?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Member for his intervention, and I concur with his concerns on the issue.

I agree fully with the call in the motion to look more closely at the issue. Given the precarious nature of the situation, the directions issued by the Department on catch and release are a reasonable response. However, it must be noted that there is a much more wide-ranging issue at hand, and we must not simply look at Northern Ireland in isolation. Northern Ireland is a member of the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization. Many other countries in that organisation are in the same position and have the same concerns about sustainability. We are talking about a wild fish that travels through a vast swathe of ocean, and international scientific research shows that north Atlantic salmon are, unfortunately, dying at sea at an alarming rate. That is an internationally accepted reality. With that information, we must consider Northern Ireland's position within that wide-ranging picture. Given the concern of local anglers and angling organisations —

Mr Swann: I thank the Member for allowing me to make an intervention. We all accept that the wider ecological problems in the north Atlantic have a major effect on salmon numbers. Does he agree that that is why we must do all that we can to ensure that the 5% of salmon that return to our rivers gets to the spawning beds, so that they can get back out to sea to increase stock levels?

Mr Irwin: I thank the Member for his intervention. I concur that we need to do all that we can so that that can take place.

It is clear that the Minister has a lot of work to do in turning the situation around. I am concerned by the commonly held view that the Department has systematically failed to listen to the anglers and angling organisations who have, year on year, raised concerns with DCAL. It appears that, in recent weeks, the Minister has suddenly woken up to the fact that a potential fine is looming, and she now appears to be clutching at straws in an attempt to navigate a way around the issue. Indeed, one could say that she is all at sea.

The matter is a serious one. Net applications have been applied for, and DCAL must make a quick decision on those. I urge the Minister to get on top of her brief and to act in the best interests, first and foremost, of the salmon stocks and of anglers and legitimate netmen in Northern Ireland. Salmon stocks cannot be allowed to continue to plummet. I urge action to conserve the north Atlantic salmon and greater co-operation with all the countries in the NASCO. I fear that our reputation as an angling destination and, in particular, a location for salmon fishing may be at risk because of the adverse publicity that this matter has generated. We do not want to be seen as a region with scant regard for conservation. I support the motion.

11.15 am

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I support the motion, which deals with fish stocks and, in particular, salmon stocks within the DCAL jurisdiction. Conservation levels have been established in rivers within the remit of DCAL. Unfortunately, those monitored rivers — I emphasise the word “monitored” — have failed to achieve conservation levels in most years since 2002.

As stated, the long-term monitoring of salmon survival during the marine phase of their life cycle at the Bushmills salmon station shows a decline to 5% in the past 15 years. It is on the back of that information that the present Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure moved quickly and firmly. In a written statement of 17 January, the Minister stated:

“After careful consideration of all...scientific research and data...the continued commercial exploitation of wild Atlantic salmon and killing of salmon...by rod and line in the DCAL jurisdiction is currently untenable. Authorising...exploitation would be inconsistent with the Departments obligations under the EC Habitats Directive and with NASCO guidelines. This could lead to significant infraction fines being imposed by the EC.”

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to bring the microphone closer to him.

Mr McMullan: I am sorry, Mr Speaker. What did the Minister do? That has been lost on Members this morning, with one saying that the Minister has to move on the issue and that she is all at sea. However, that Member has missed the boat. The Minister has moved more quickly than the tide has come in or gone out. I will make it clear once again: the Minister has called for voluntary catch and release by the rod and line men and for the netmen voluntarily to give up their nets this year to give us a breathing space so that we can sit down and talk together. It is not solely down to the Minister to sort out the problem. As the motion rightly states —

Mr Swann: Will the Member give way?

Mr McMullan: I will in a wee minute. I am just getting into it.

Lord Morrow: You are just getting into the flow of it.

Mr McMullan: I will come to you in a minute, so wait there. *[Interruption.]*

I am glad that Members are taking such a keen interest in conservation, and I am quite happy with some of their comments. There are other people involved whom we have not mentioned. We have mentioned DCAL and the local angling clubs. Local angling clubs are the lifeblood of the rivers. They keep the stocks going and the whole thing moving. That has been lost on Members a little bit. However, private owners in the jurisdiction do not have to record any fish catches. That came out of the research that was done. There is no requirement for private fishery owners to make catch returns, but there is a requirement on licensed anglers to record their catches. We have to look at that.

Mr Swann: Does the Member accept that there is no requirement on private fishery owners to keep those records because they run commercial enterprises and stock their waters out of their own pocket? Judging by his responses to earlier interventions, the Member is beginning to flounder, never mind get lost in the flow. He asked for clarification, but one of the problems that we have today is that, although the Minister called for voluntary catch and release, which was commended, her Department has yet to clarify whether that voluntary catch and release will be mandatory in DCAL-managed waters. Many angling clubs are waiting to see whether the Department will make their waters mandatory catch and release before they make that commitment.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McMullan: I thank the Member for his intervention. However, we have to wait until the Minister speaks. We cannot play to the gallery, so to speak. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McMullan: We need to operate the scheme successfully. Putting everything else aside, we are all serious about fish conservation, which is central. However, we need an element of trust and for everyone to work together. We all agree on the need for immediate action, but we have another potential problem. I return to the issue of the private owners. We need them and The Honourable The Irish Society to be involved up front.

Mr Ó hOisín: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that there are many private interests that have inherited fishing rights from 300 and 400 years ago but do nothing to enhance the rivers except to extract what is possibly a post-colonial tax on local fishermen?

Mr Swann: Oh, come on. Now you are playing to the gallery.

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

Mr McMullan: I thought that I was getting extra time, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: You have already had extra time.

Mr McMullan: I hope that, when all is said and done, we can help the Minister to sort out the problem.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr McMullan: She has been the first Minister to deal with it, and I hope that we can all get behind her.

Mr Frew: I am thankful for the opportunity to speak on the motion, which relates to a serious issue for all concerned with salmon and fish stocks. I received a great number of representations from local anglers in my constituency of North Antrim who fish all the rivers in that constituency. As someone who grew up a stone's throw away from the Kellswater river and now lives even closer to the Braid river and whose son is a keen angler at the age of 10, I know how important this is to the fishermen and anglers of our rivers. It is important that we discuss this serious issue and that the Department and the Minister take on board everything that is said. Having talked to all the people involved, I think that there is awareness that we cannot keep doing the same thing.

The issue has different aspects and spheres. There is the illegal netting on Lough Neagh, commercial salmon netting on the north coast and the bag limit of two rod-caught salmon per day from 1 June to 31 October every year. Add to all those aspects and conditions the wider aspects of global warming and what is happening to our sea species, not only salmon but most fish stocks. Add to that the problems that our main trawler industries have in Kilkeel, Ardglass and other places —

Miss M McIlveen: Portavogie.

Mr Frew: Portavogie — thank you very much — that are struggling and are stymied by quotas because of the present fishing rights. We have to get to a point where all our fishing is sustainable, not least fishing of salmon in our rivers and the north Atlantic.

Illegal netting is a major issue for DCAL. I received a letter from the Minister on the issue a couple of months ago. There were 61 boat patrols between June 2009 and March 2010. Between April 2010 and March 2011, there were 104. There were 16 illegal nets seized in the first period, and 33 illegal nets seized in the second period. The length of illegal nets seized in Lough Neagh in the first period was 8.5 km, and it was 22.3 km between April 2010 and March 2011. That is a major issue that DCAL must get to grips with.

We also have to look at commercial salmon netting on the north coast. Having spoken to people involved, I know that that they are also very aware of the issues around salmon stocks. They are prepared to work, as the motion calls for, to develop an action plan that would be put in place by DCAL. It is essential that that action plan is put in place. The entire spectrum of the angling community from young to old will tell you that we have such a great prospect for our tourist industry here. This can attract people from all over Europe, America and the world to Northern Ireland to hobby fish. We need to base our action plans on that eventuality.

Mr I McCrea: I thank my colleague for giving way. Will he join me in commending the lobby group that was set up for having the desire to ensure that the issue of salmon species is brought to the fore and, indeed, that tourism potential is the real focus for the local community?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr Frew: Thank you for that intervention, Mr McCrea. Yes, I certainly will. I commend all who are involved in this

campaign, including the many who have come to speak to me in my office, written to me or taken the time to ring me to tell me how important an issue it is for them. I have met people from all the river clubs and angling clubs in and around the Ballymena area and wider afield. So, I know particularly well how important that issue is to them.

We all want and need the same thing: decent salmon stocks. I believe that most anglers in this country are conservationists and have that in mind. There is evidence to suggest that there are anglers who catch fish in an irresponsible way, and I think that the clubs themselves are the first to agree that that is the case. However, they are trying to manage that and to turn it round through catch-and-release schemes. Not all clubs have bought into this yet, but I hope that they will do so. The onus is most definitely on the Minister to tackle the issue, to make a difference here and to make sure that we can reverse the trend of declining salmon stocks.

Mrs Overend: I am pleased to join my colleagues Robin Swann and Danny Kinahan in bringing the motion to the House today. This is an important issue not only for the environment and the ecosystem in Northern Ireland but for our economy. As the Ulster Unionist Party's enterprise, trade and investment spokesperson, I want to draw on Members' support in calling for the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to work in partnership with other Departments to develop an appropriate action plan that will enhance the tourism potential.

Tourism is an industry to which we must pay particular attention, considering that visitor numbers have decreased and revenue from that source has fallen in recent years. Recreational angling could play a part in rejuvenating that aspect of our economy. However, to date, that has not been the case. In the draft tourism strategy, which has remained in draft form since early 2010, angling is mentioned briefly as one market segment that is included only as a short-term priority, and it did not even make it into the action plan at the end of the document.

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

A report published by PricewaterhouseCoopers in 2007 highlighted the potential positives from angling for the Northern Ireland economy. It stated that, in 2005, recreational angling was worth £20.5 million per annum and predicted that that would rise to £71.4 million per annum by 2015, with opportunities to create up to 2,464 jobs. An estimated 30,000 anglers participate each year, and, according to figures from the 2005 season, the average spend of an angler during that season was over £1,300. Fishing holidays and sport fishing tourism are also booming international business opportunities. That gives some indication of the capacity for growth in that sector.

Mr Beggs: The Glens Angling Club in my constituency of East Antrim recognised the importance of conservation and introduced a catch-and-release scheme a number of years ago. It has also improved spawning grounds and ensured that there is an accurate fish count with the use of a counter. Does the Member agree that it is surprising that the only sizeable run of fish occurred during rough weather, when it was not possible for the nets to operate? Does she also agree that the tourism and economic potential of

fishing tourism greatly exceeds the benefits for the few who currently fish with nets and endanger the species?

Mrs Overend: I thank the Member for his intervention. I certainly agree with him and commend the action of the people in his constituency.

I will go back to the PricewaterhouseCoopers report. It highlighted a number of recommendations and suggested that consideration be given to the strategies used in other regions. Northern Ireland can learn from the rest of the United Kingdom. Figures show that angler gross expenditure across the whole of England and Wales was just under £1.2 billion, with almost 38,000 jobs created across those regions. It is also estimated that Scottish anglers spend a total of £131 million on angling, which consequently generates hundreds of jobs. At a time of budget reductions and job losses, developing potential areas of growth is key to tackling unemployment and to growing the economy. The identification of angling as an integral part of our tourism strategy would undoubtedly generate income and create jobs. However, that is only the direct impact. The indirect economic benefits are also attractive, with local businesses being supported. One of my local angling clubs, in the small village of Coagh, told me that, when over 400 anglers came to fish for dollaghan in the Ballinderry river, they all spent money in the local shops, cafes, garages and hotels.

Who can deny that angling has the potential for great economic benefits?

11.30 am

In 2002, when Coagh Angling Club won the British Urban Regeneration Association award for its work on the Ballinderry river, it was disappointed by the response from government when it urged them to promote salmon and dollaghan fishing across the Province. It feels that it is no further forward 10 years later. I urge the Minister to work with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, particularly on the development of a strategy promoting angling tourism.

During the length of the campaign, I have been most impressed by the selfless attitude of anglers from numerous parts of Northern Ireland, not only from the No to Salmon Nets in Irish Waters group but from anglers in Coagh and Moyola in my constituency and the Foyle system in the north-west, as well as the many whom I spoke to at the information day that was organised so expertly by our DCAL expert, Robin Swann. I congratulate them on taking responsibility for the future stocks of indigenous fish species and recognising the flailing stocks, with the hope that their actions will put pressure on the Assembly and the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to ensure future stocks for generations to come. Numerous angling clubs have voluntarily decided to have a catch-and-release scheme, and I commend them for doing so. However, that cannot be done without a long-term strategic approach from the Loughs Agency, the Salmon and Inland Fisheries Forum, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, the Environment and Heritage Service and DCAL.

In conclusion, I call on the Minister to take the lead on the issues raised today. It is not too late to turn the tide and still build on a strong fishing tourism industry in Northern Ireland. We need to develop and encourage the angling community to boost tourism, and the rest of the

UK illustrates the potential benefits that that can bring. Northern Ireland can offer some of the greatest natural waterways in Europe.

Mr McMullan: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Overend: I am almost finished, sorry. It is my last sentence.

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

Mrs Overend: Northern Ireland can offer some of the greatest natural waterways in Europe, and, with the right emphasis, angling could be a very successful driver for tourism.

Mr Byrne: I support the motion, and I commend the Members who tabled it. I also commend the fishing interests that have created such a stir since last summer. There is now a strong lobby from the fishing fraternity because the river system is in crisis. The motion calls on the Minister and other relevant Departments and stakeholders to develop an action plan, which is crucial for the future of our river system. I commend the main lobby bodies, including No to Salmon Nets in Irish Waters, which was set up in July 2011 when three young men, Andrew McGall, Mark Tierney and Seamus Donnelly, set up a Facebook page to open up a public debate about the crisis in our river system. That is one of the main reasons why we are debating the subject today. Foyle Association of Salmon and Trout Anglers (FASTA) is an umbrella body that represents around 12 fishing clubs and associations in the Foyle system. It recognises the crisis in the Foyle system.

There is confusion in that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is in charge of the overall river system in Northern Ireland, while the Loughs Agency, which is an intergovernmental cross-border body, is charged with management and licensing in the Foyle system and the Carlingford system. However, the Loughs Agency is in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), yet the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, who, I am glad to say is present for the debate and is taking a serious interest in the issue, has responsibility for the licensing of fishing in Northern Ireland.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member agree that what he has just said illustrates that there is a need to reorganise how fishing is run in Northern Ireland and to try to bring it under one Department, rather than many, as is currently the case?

Mr Byrne: I agree with the Member. That is why the motion calls for co-ordination and asks the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to co-ordinate between all of the stakeholders. Unfortunately, the fishing stocks, certainly on the Foyle system, have gone down by 80% in the past 15 years. We have now reached a crisis point where the different clubs and, indeed, the privately owned water associations realise that, unless there is co-operation, crisis will not be averted. We are calling for a sustained and managed approach to conservation and the management of the rivers. The Omagh Anglers Association has 800 members, and the club has been going since 1942. All the people who are involved in that club have the best interests of fishing at heart, but they realise that there is a crisis. Anglers on the Finn, Mourne and Glebe, all of which are in the Foyle system, have been calling out for years for what was the Foyle Fisheries Commission to recognise the deteriorating state of the river system. They feel strongly that the senior management of

the commission, which has been replaced by the Loughs Agency, did not take the crisis seriously.

I pay tribute to the river bailiffs who work for the Loughs Agency. They are consistent, dedicated and do the best that they can to make sure that illegal fishing does not take place. All clubs involved in the Foyle system feel very strongly that the licensed net holders at the mouth of the Foyle and between Strabane and Derry have, for years, been allowed legally to exploit the river. They have depleted stocks so much that all those who fish upriver are being denied the chance to engage in what I would call legitimate fishing on the rod. Many of the clubs have been involved in catch-and-release systems for a long time. Many have behaved responsibly and operated a voluntary system. However, the time has come for statutory action, statutory co-ordination and good statutory management of our river system.

I am glad that so many in the Chamber are taking the issue seriously and wanting, at last, to have a co-ordinated approach. The fact that so many interested parties from the fishing fraternity are in the Public Gallery is testimony to the serious situation that the river system is in. The time has come for action. I am glad that the Minister is present, and it is fair to say that she has taken a keen interest in the lobbying over the past six months. We all have to help and co-ordinate our efforts to make sure that, at long last, a sustainable, managed system is put in place to protect the river system into the future.

Lord Morrow: I find the debate quite interesting. However, as we look at the motion, I think that there is a danger that we will throw the baby out with the bathwater. It is ironic that we are having the debate today. Northern Ireland has come through 40 years of tumult and trouble, and it is ironic that we now find that we have to change our fishing and angling patterns and do things completely differently. Why are we saying that? It is patently obvious that we are doing it because, in my opinion, illegal fishing is the biggest source of our problem here. I do not for one minute believe that the person who goes out with a rod and line is the problem or the cause of the reduction in salmon stock.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Lord Morrow: Right, OK. Come on.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member accept that the licensed nets and the licensed bag nets that scoop up virtually all the fish in some of our bays adversely affect rivers in my constituency, such as the Dun and the Glenarm? Does he accept that legal, licensed nets are also a problem?

Lord Morrow: I hear what the Member says. Had he waited for a moment or two, I might have made a similar, but not identical, point.

At the outset, I should declare that I am a member of a number of angling clubs. So I do not come to the debate as a garden centre person who has never held a fishing rod in his life and sees one only when it is sitting on a table or hanging in a butcher's shop. *[Interruption.]* Do you want to say something? Does the Member want to speak? Is it you, Mr Nesbitt, or your colleague?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please, Lord Morrow. I will chair the meeting.

Lord Morrow: Maybe the Members will show me the same respect as I showed them, but they know little about that, I suspect.

Many MLAs who are not directly involved in angling do not fully appreciate what angling means to, for instance, a young fellow who goes out to fish and might aspire to catch a salmon. It may well take him the greater part of his lifetime to accomplish that. The Minister is now asking for a voluntary scheme. I heard the same quarter talk in the same sentence about a mandatory and a voluntary scheme. To me, one contradicts the other. I do not know how you can talk in the one sentence about something that is mandatory and something that is voluntary. Quite frankly, I think that the two are opposites. So, what we are being asked for today is a voluntary ban on fish kill.

However, is it not true that we have illegal netting going on and that we have bailiffs who, at times, risk their very lives to ensure that those illegal nets are not in operation? Indeed, some of them have nearly had their life taken when they have gone to enforce that and to try to gather the nets from the various rivers, where they are scooping up salmon at a considerable rate.

In January, the Minister answered a number of questions on this. It was ironic that the questions that she was dealing with were very similar. It was also noted that the three Members — I will not mention their names — all come from different facets of life, yet they asked very similar questions. The questions were about the 1966 Fisheries Act. The Minister says that that is a robust piece of legislation, and it is. There was an admission that there is a gap in it, but the one encouraging thing that she said was that it was constantly under review and that it would be upgraded and reviewed constantly. However, it has to be said that, since that Act was brought in, there have been many EU directives on fishing. I want to hear from the Minister today whether her Department is now compliant with all those directives, and, if not, when she intends bringing forward the necessary legislation to ensure that it is.

Joe Byrne touched on some of the issues that I think are important. We have a rivers system here in Northern Ireland that I believe does not receive the proper status that it is entitled to. That rivers system is one of our natural resources, but, if you go to one of those rivers, you will very often find all sorts of debris being washed down from the remains of an old worn-out car, for example. That is then deposited into our rivers. Does anyone here believe for a second that that is the way to treat one of our natural resources? Yet, I seldom, if ever, hear of anyone who is brought before the courts for that type of activity. I hear about pollution and about the farmers who are brought to court from time to time.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close please.

Lord Morrow: I sometimes think that they are an easy touch, but I do not think that they are the greatest criminals as far as the destruction of our rivers is concerned.

Mr G Robinson: This is an issue that local angling clubs in my constituency have been discussing with me over the past three years. Those discussions have included contacting the current and previous Ministers in different Departments and arranging meetings. I am pleased to support the motion. I am acutely aware that the leisure fishing sector has an

important role to play in helping to boost our tourist industry in the years to come, but fishermen will come only if they are able to catch fish, especially the north Atlantic salmon.

I welcome the Minister's reassurance in her response to a question for oral answer that I asked a couple of weeks ago about the assistance that her Department gives to local angling groups that are engaged in restocking rivers. That is one small measure in what must be a larger overall protection strategy. Another important part of a conservation strategy must be to look at the impact on sustainability of salmon nets on the north coast. I urge all Members to support the motion, as the importance of local species, especially salmon, will be the basis for developing the tourist potential throughout Northern Ireland.

11.45 am

Mr I McCrea: I welcome the debate here today as well as the lobby group that has come along. I commend it in its efforts to ensure that the debate was brought to the Floor.

As my colleague Lord Morrow said, and it is very difficult to follow a man who has spent most of his life up a river or down a river, or whatever it is called in fishing terms —

Lord Morrow: And in it.

Mr I McCrea: At times, he has been in it and felt the effects of that. I am not a fisherman, nor am I associated with fishing whatsoever. Personally, I find it hard to understand how anyone could find the patience to stand in or at the side of a river and catch nothing other than a cold. However, as Lord Morrow said, sometimes it takes a lifetime for people to catch the fish that they want to catch.

I had the privilege of attending an event in Stormont in January to hear directly from people in the lobby group who shared their concerns. For me, it delivered home the message that there is a problem and that we as a legislature need to do what we can to ensure that it does not continue. I also had the opportunity to attend a public meeting in Castledawson in my constituency. It was evident that the people who were there were the lifeblood of the angling community. There were many years of angling experience in that room, but most importantly, the passion with which each individual spoke on this issue was evident, and they should be commended again for their actions to ensure that we have this debate.

The Minister and others who have more of an interest in fishing, certainly more than me, have heard the issues around the need to protect the indigenous fish stocks and more so the north Atlantic salmon.

Mr McGlone: Does the Member accept that many fishing clubs not only sustain the stocks in the rivers but contribute in a very meaningful way to a lot of other environmental projects along the edges of the rivers and in the local communities? I am thinking particularly of the clubs at Ballinderry and Moyola. That must be placed on record; without those clubs, a lot of other issues would suffer.

Mr I McCrea: I wholeheartedly agree with my constituency colleague, and I am more than aware of the issues that he raises. Others have spoken of the tourism potential of angling and its importance.

I support the motion. A number of years ago a friend told me that men and fish are alike; they both get into trouble when they open their mouths. That says it all for me.

Mr D McIlveen: I am not going to say anything about the Member's mouth, but I wonder whether he agrees that, although the lobby group that has been formed has to be commended, some Members in this Assembly have sought to politicise this issue, which may have caused some of that good work to be in some way discredited? Does he agree that that is reprehensible?

Mr I McCrea: I think that is an important point, and I have spoken with members of the lobby group to ensure that politics is not made part of it. I know from speaking to people involved with it that that is not something in which they want to get involved. Anyone who tries to bring politics into this issue is not doing so in the interests of the angling community.

I support the motion and look forward to the Minister's response.

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. This has been a very good debate. To quickly tally up, although I will stand corrected by the Official Report, there have been 13 Members speaking and seven interventions, loads of quotes and plenty of puns. I think that the Hansard report will be a joy to read tomorrow. I think that all the contributors pointed out that this motion has cross-party support. There were a couple of comments made, particularly the last one, that I am not too sure about. However, I agree that the politicisation of angling and fishing rights is regrettable.

I thank Robin Swann and others for tabling the motion and Members for their concern. The concern about supporting the sustainability of our indigenous fish species has been very clear throughout the debate. My Department, which has responsibility for the conservation and protection of salmon and inland fisheries, is already doing much in that respect. Some people may feel that it needs to do more, and that is where we get into further discussion, particularly between the Committee and the Department, about what else we can do. If we all take a can-do attitude, in an appropriate and respectful environment, that will be the way forward, and it is what we need to do. There would be an acknowledgement of the significant staff and financial resources that have been committed to salmon and inland fisheries at a time of budgetary constraint.

The statutory basis for responsibility for the conservation and protection of salmon and inland fisheries in the North is found in the Fisheries Act 1966, as amended. When originally drafted, the Act was intended to reflect the fact that salmon and inland fisheries were lawfully possessed and enjoyed as such under title. Statutory provisions were drafted to stop poaching or other activity that might directly and locally impact on that property. The Act also introduced a licensing regime covering both commercial fishermen and recreational anglers that sought to generate a revenue stream to fund enforcement of the provisions.

I welcome, in particular, the comments made by Joe Byrne and Lord Morrow in tribute to the enforcement officers on our waterways and rivers. I am sure that the enforcement officers will appreciate the fact that they were mentioned

throughout the debate in appreciation of the service that they provide.

Regular inspections have been, and are, carried out at commercial dealers, fish retail outlets, and hotels and restaurants to ensure that freshwater fish being sold have been legally caught. Such monitoring will be ongoing. Indeed, such enforcement activities are a first step in preventing the impact of over-exploitation and illegal fishing on fish stocks. However, the management of fisheries is complex, as almost all Members who contributed pointed out. Many of the factors that impact on fisheries management are outside the control of my Department and, therefore, depend on co-operation with other Departments. Sustainability is at the core of modern fisheries management.

The DCAL strategic approach — with partners — to regulate fisheries and conserve, enhance and, indeed, restore fish habitats aims to ensure that the fish populations that support our salmon and inland commercial and recreational fisheries are sustained within safe biological limits. To target our activities effectively, we must know the state of fish stocks, and, to do that, DCAL commissions the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute to carry out monitoring and research. The science confirms that populations of two of our most important indigenous fish species — eels and salmon — are currently outside safe biological limits. That, again, was mentioned by many Members.

Mr Swann: Minister, I just want to clarify something. You mentioned two species, but does your Department have any intention of monitoring levels of other fish species in Lough Neagh, such as dollyhagan, perch and roach?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The ongoing monitoring and evaluation needs to continue with a specific eye on other species. If the evidence suggests that other species are endangered, as I think is the Member's point, and if that is proven, we will bring forward management plans for those species. Therefore, the answer to the question is yes. Key to that is proving that the species are endangered and that, like eels and salmon, their levels fall outside the safe biological limits. It is currently under review.

The motion calls for the development of an action plan, and I can confirm to the House that my Department has had in place plans for the conservation of eels and salmon. In reference to the point that Mr Swann has just made, I hope that other species may be added to that, if the need is proven by scientific evidence.

Indeed, in September 2007, the European Commission adopted the EU eel regulation, which aims to establish measures for the recovery of the European eel stock. My Department's programme for the conservation of eel stock is set out in three eel management plans, which were approved by the European Commission in March 2010. The implementation of the plans has not been without pain, as people know. Indeed, it resulted in the closure of the commercial eel fishery at Lough Erne.

The Neagh/Bann eel management plan provides a scientific rationale that the conservation target is being met due to prudent management of the fishery under close regulation and subject to ongoing monitoring. The Department is working on the input to the review of the eel management plans by the European Commission and, later, we will learn whether the management measures we have taken

to conserve eel stocks are achieving the conservation objectives set out by the European eel regulation.

Long-term monitoring of survival of salmon during the marine phase of their life cycle conducted at the Department's Bushmills salmon station shows a decline in salmon returning to the River Bush to spawn from around 30% in 1997 to less than 5% today. Many Members made reference to that. The North of Ireland, through the European Union, as a jurisdiction of a member state, is party to the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization, which aims to conserve, restore, enhance and rationally manage Atlantic salmon stocks through international co-operation. We are expected by the EU to work towards the objectives of NASCO agreements and resolutions.

DCAL has developed an implementation plan, also known as the salmon management strategy, which was approved by NASCO five years ago. Three focus area reports have also been produced, which detail the actions that have been taken. In conjunction with the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), conservation limits have been established for a suite of rivers, which represent the index of river types under DCAL's jurisdiction. The monitored rivers have failed to achieve conservation limits in most years since 2002. NASCO guidelines state that fishing on stocks that are below the conservation limits should not be permitted. That applies equally to commercial netting and recreational angling.

AFBI has also determined that licensed drift net and bag net fishing for salmon off the County Antrim coast are intercepting mixed stocks of salmon from rivers monitored by DCAL, as well as salmon from the Foyle catchment area. After careful consideration of all the available scientific research and data, it has been concluded that the continued commercial exploitation of wild Atlantic salmon and the killing of salmon caught by rod and line under DCAL's jurisdiction is untenable. Authorising such exploitation would be inconsistent with the Department's obligations under the EU habitats directive and NASCO guidelines. That could lead to significant infraction fines being imposed by the EU. That was mentioned by many Members. If those fines were levied, it would have a real impact not just on our fisheries but on our wider public services, so it is incumbent on all stakeholders to work together to make sure that salmon stocks are more sustainable for the sake of salmon and to avoid cuts in our public services.

I recently called on stakeholders to support a range of voluntary conservation measures for 2012. I will need to get back to Lord Morrow in writing on some of his specific questions during his intervention and his main contribution. It would take too much time now, but I will get back to him about what has happened since 1997; I have a list. The point is that we have asked for a voluntary cessation this year to help us repair gaps in legislation. That is under review. We will consider what subordinate legislation is necessary to take this forward. It is not just about catch and release; it may include not catching salmon at all. We need to be clear about what we intend to do beyond this June. We will make a decision within the next few days. A decision is imminent not only on the way forward on this, but on issuing licences for commercial nets. In response to the question that Mr Swann asked yesterday and the points that he raised in proposing the motion, I hope that that clarifies some of the issues that he and Lord Morrow raised.

I have written to commercial fishermen asking them for a voluntary cessation for salmon fishing in 2012, and, through the Salmon and Inland Fisheries Forum, we have asked recreational anglers to practise catch and release for salmon in 2012. Early indications are encouraging, with a number of angling clubs and anglers expressing support for voluntary catch and release. Indeed, Members mentioned that some of those policies have been operational for some time because the anglers who are on the rivers all the time know the state of the fish stocks, probably well before many other people.

12.00 noon

My Department is also involved in vital habitat enhancement works on the areas of rivers in which salmon spawn and their fry develop. My Department will consider whether changes to the way in which fisheries are regulated are necessary in light of population changes and will consult stakeholders on any proposals.

What has come out throughout this debate is the collaborative work that has begun. That needs to happen and needs to be strengthened for the further development of proper fishing and understanding of policies around recreational and commercial fishing.

Rather than go through a lot of issues that have been covered by most of the Members, I will respond to one of the questions that was asked and clarify that I will continue to commit departmental resources to fisheries, with a focus on conservation and protection in line with competing priorities. So, I will stand up for people who are involved in the angling community to maximise the impact of our work to sustain and grow the fish stocks in our waters.

Sandra Overend and other Members asked whether I would work and liaise with other Departments, particularly around the economic regeneration and sustainability that angling can bring to small communities. For some communities, angling is the main business. I will do that.

I assert that my Department is already well advanced in the development and implementation of the sustainability action plans. However, much more work needs to be done, and I am taking a can-do approach. The door is open. There is a collective responsibility, and I am happy to take the lead on that. I see that the Member who tabled the motion is smiling, so I hope that he understands the commitment —

Mr Swann: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Ní Chuilín: No, I have already given way. My time is running out, and I have a few final comments to make.

I thank Members for their contributions. The number of Members who contributed shows the commitment and love that people have for angling and conservation and the commitment and respect they have for our waterways. Whatever difficulties there have been in reacting to the issue in the past, since I have come into the Department, I have made it a priority. I do not think anybody, regardless of what political party they come from, can disagree with the fact that I have taken action not just because of the possible threat of European fines but because it is the right thing to do.

I am delighted that the motion has been debated today, and I look forward to further discussion with the Committee and other Members on the issue.

Mr Kinahan: It falls happily to me to make the winding-up speech. On behalf of the other Members who tabled the motion, I thank my colleagues for all the efforts they have put into this issue. I also thank the Ulster Angling Federation, the No to Salmon Nets group, FASTA, FISSTA, the 5,300 people who signed the petition and everyone else behind it. I also congratulate the Minister on the work that she has done to date and, particularly, for saying that she will work under that can-do heading. We will keep her to that. I am also keen that she has made the issue a priority.

As I go through some of my points, I will make other little points. The motion calls on the Assembly to note the number of indigenous fish species, but we also need to control legal fishing and completely stop illegal fishing, which is no longer sustainable. That is what we have to remember.

We also call on all Departments to work together to develop an action plan. We want to see an action plan put in place as soon as possible because we want to see the fish stocks improved in partnership with all stakeholders.

Sometimes I wonder whether we have understood the enormity of the task. It is not just about, as in my case, the Sixmilewater and its tributaries and Lough Neagh. It is not just about eels, salmon, dollaghan, pike and pollan but about lobster, crab and sea bass. It is not just about pollution and the care of rivers and loughs or inland or offshore angling. It is about the whole ecosystem and what we humans do to it, both destructive and constructive. It is about all that we do that affects fish stocks.

As a councillor, which I am no longer, I sat on the Lough Neagh Advisory Committee. It was an excellent body, which, sadly, is defunct due to the previous Environment Minister's not keeping it in place. On that body we had academics, sportsmen, businessmen, environmentalists and other people who were keen on everything to do with Lough Neagh. We sat down to discuss and manage the largest inland lough in the UK. It taught me something true, which is the importance in politics of the need to find the balance between all the needs and all the users. When it comes to fish stocks, we have, at present, lost that balance.

We have no data and I mean no data on fish stocks in Lough Neagh. I fought for nearly three years to get DCAL to properly tackle the netting that was stopping the fish going up our rivers. I congratulate those concerned on the work that has gone on, but we need more.

Mr McMullan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kinahan: Yes, when I get to the winding-up part of my speech.

In October 2011, in response to a question for oral answer that I asked, the Minister said that 24,572 metres of nets had been removed from Lough Neagh alone. As an estimate, that would probably get you from the City Hall in Belfast to the courthouse in Antrim where, I hope, those who are engaged in illegal netting will end up. Next door to it would be even better.

We need not just data on fish stocks but legislation. I am glad to hear that legislation is coming. We need new

legislation, something that pulls it all together, and more power and access to fishing premises so that those enforcing can do their job properly. Therefore, I ask the Minister to talk to the Justice Minister and to look at how we can do that better. The police need more powers, the enforcement teams need more resources, and, most importantly, Ministers and everyone must show the will.

We sense a small victory in what has been going on over netting, but, in the past day or two, there have been hints that there was an attempt to roll back slightly. It is good to see voluntary catch and release, but we must enforce catch and release, because only mandatory will work. There was a rather barbed remark about The Honourable The Irish Society, which puts a lot of resources into the rivers. That was extremely wrong, because the society does a great deal and helps the schools in Londonderry. However, there are private people who fish who need help to make their decisions, which will happen through a mandatory, not a voluntary, scheme.

As I said, we need all Departments working together. I know all of you know this, but I will reiterate it. We have DCAL with the licences and the fishing; DARD with the Rivers Agency and the Loughs Agency; the Department of the Environment with the cleanliness of the rivers and enforcement; and DRD with the sewage and the water. Last week, the Ballynure fishermen met with those involved in the Ballyclare waste project, and they have agreed to share information. So, there is an example of people working together.

We also have the councils with their local issues, their responsibilities for cleanliness and, where they have them, biodiversity officers. All councils should have such officers. We also have the legislation that comes through from the UK and, south of the border, from the Irish and through Europe. We need to pull all that together because, at the moment, it is a muddle. We have the Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1966, which many of you referred to and which one Minister who is not here has said is not fit for purpose. Some aspects of fishing are included in the Foyle Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland), which dates back to 1952. I was not born then — nearly.

It is time for new legislation. We have the Marine Bill coming through at the moment, but we need everyone to work together, not just the Departments. We need all the MLAs — all of you in here and your colleagues. We need all the councillors to pull together. We need everyone to work towards the same aim. We need the fishermen to work together, whether in the north, south, east or west. Everyone, all the stakeholders, must work together, and do not forget that there are others too: the birdwatchers, farmers and rambles. The whole of Northern Ireland is watching what we do with our rivers. I go back to one of the key points: we need an action plan, and we need to get it in as soon as we can. I have written here, “Yes, you can, Minister”. So, Minister, I add that to your “can do”.

There are resources. In Europe, £5 billion is available, possibly more, to support fisheries, aquaculture and bottom-up local development. That financial provision was written in such a way that it seemed to be there only to help coastal fishermen, but, when the Fisheries Minister was here the other day, we asked him about it, and he said that the landlocked countries in Europe are all pushing for their share. We should push for our share for inland waterways

to make sure that we get a good share of that £5 billion so that we can manage our fisheries into the future. It falls on all of us to get to know the regulations and to fight together. There is a great deal that we need to do.

I would begin to wind up, but a Member asked me whether I would give way. Would you still like me to?

Mr McMullan: I thank you for giving way. I think that the whole House agrees that such an action plan needs to be put into operation now. Would you agree that a part of that plan needs to be a central register of all fishing rights and land ownership of inland rivers and waterways?

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Member for his suggestion. I point that to the Minister and to all those who should pull together in the action plan. If that is the sort of tool that is needed and it is all agreed on, that is the way we should go.

I am going to run out of time, but I thank everyone for their input. Everybody agreed, and we have laid down the plans for the future. Let us all keep our eye on the ball. We need an action plan, data, urgency and all Departments to pull together. We need to be in touch with Europe and to understand everything that goes on there. We need all stakeholders —

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

Mr Kinahan: We need you to grasp the moment and have the will. Grasp, if necessary, the Ministers and make everyone pull together to save our fish stocks.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes that a number of indigenous fish species, including salmon, are being exploited by both legal and illegal fishing to the point where stocks are no longer sustainable; calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in partnership with other relevant Departments and following consultation with key stakeholders, to develop an action plan, which includes actions required by the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization, to improve the sustainability of relevant fish stocks in the forthcoming and subsequent seasons; and further calls on the Minister to work in partnership with all relevant stakeholders to deliver the action plan.

12.15 pm

Organ Donation

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

Mr Wells: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to undertake a review of organ donation.

At the outset, I will say that we are more than happy to accept the SDLP amendment to the motion. We will not press it to a vote.

On 18 July 2011, Declan Quinn, aged 37, was killed in a hit-and-run incident in Coalisland, County Tyrone. He carried an organ donor card, and following his tragic death no fewer than seven of his organs were transplanted to those on the waiting list. A four-year-old girl who was born blind and had never seen her parents had Declan Quinn's corneas transplanted onto her eyes and saw her parents for the first time. Another young girl, who had cancer, received a new liver. In the midst of a tragic situation, Declan Quinn's relatives had the comfort of knowing that his death had brought life and a much better quality of life to others.

Declan Quinn carried a donor card. As of 3 February 2012, 515,659 people carry such cards, including myself, which is 40% of the population. So, great progress has been made in that respect. I will give a few examples of what has occurred in recent years. There has been a significant increase in the number of kidney transplants. There were 59 in 2008-09 and a 39% increase to 70 in 2009-2010. In the year to date, there have already been 77. So, progress is being made on kidney transplants. In 2010-11, there were 21 liver transplants, four heart transplants, four lung transplants and one combined heart and lung transplant. All those operations were performed on Northern Ireland residents but were carried out in Great Britain because we do not have the facilities to carry out transplants other than kidney transplants. Sadly, there are 300 people in Northern Ireland waiting for transplants, including 186 who are waiting for kidney transplants. Even more sadly, in 2010-11, 17 people died while on the waiting list for a kidney donor. In 2011-12, there have been nine deaths so far. In the United Kingdom, three people die every week because they are unable to find a suitable donor. That is how serious the situation is.

When this debate was announced in the media, I received several items of correspondence from people who have been caught up in this difficult position. I have their consent to read into the record some of what they said. Karl Partridge from Crossgar said he had been on the waiting list for a liver transplant for two years. He finally got the opportunity for a transplant three weeks ago in King's College Hospital, London. His liver was badly diseased due to a problem called PSC, which gradually eroded his health and lifespan over a 12-year period. In his case, the

operation was a remarkable success. He has been home for three weeks and is recovering. He says:

"It has been a life-transforming experience and I will be able to be fit and active again once I recover my strength."

I have known Karl for 30 years. I was on the phone to him this morning, and he is absolutely delighted with the success of his operation.

I also received a letter from a young gentleman called Jonathan Tate, who is 21. He has been on the UK transplant list since the end of January 2011. He is awaiting a heart transplant. He was born with congenital heart disease and had open heart surgery three times, most recently in July 2010. He has also had his pacemaker replaced. In 2009, he was taken into hospital with heart failure, and his condition has continued to deteriorate. His lifestyle has changed dramatically. He ran his own business as a personal trainer, but now he struggles to socialise, cannot attend football matches and is on many forms of medication. So, we have an example of someone who has had a successful transplant and someone who is desperate for a transplant.

The reality is that there simply are not enough organs for transplant in Northern Ireland. It is as simple as that. We need to address how we can increase the number of donors and the number of organs that are available. The reason why I tabled the motion and believe that it is particularly relevant is that the Welsh Assembly has introduced a proposal for what is called "presumed consent". It is actually called "presumed consent, the soft option". It is important that we understand what that means. Presumed consent means that you are on the register unless you opt out. If you have moral, religious or philosophical objections to having your organs used for others, you sign a register to opt out. However, when it comes to the point of transplant, your friends, relatives, parents or whoever is closest to you are consulted about that decision. That is known as the soft option, in which there is still an opportunity for friends and family to say that they are not in favour. Eight of the 10 countries with the highest rate of transplants have opt-out legislation. That has been a key factor in the increase in numbers.

I will look at the arguments for and against opting out. I accept and understand the tenor of the SDLP amendment. I know that there are sincerely held views on the issue, and I will certainly not decry or argue against what will, undoubtedly, be said by Members opposite. However, there are arguments for and against opting out. The debate is on the issue of presumed consent. It is not a pragmatic debate about supply and demand; it is a debate about the relationship between the state and the bodies of those who have passed away. A number of countries in the European Union have adopted versions of the opt-out organ donation system. They include Austria, Spain, France, Sweden, Denmark and Norway. Wales has entered into debate and is consulting on changing the legislation. As I said, there are two overarching options: the soft option and the hard option.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member for giving way. I am following with interest what he says. He talked about eight of the 10 countries having an opt-out clause. Is he aware of whether any of the eight with an opt-out clause have the soft option or a variation of that?

Mr Wells: All the countries that I listed have the soft option, with the exception of Austria, which has what is called the hard option. That is the opt-out scenario, which means that the family's wishes are not taken into account at the time of transplant. I do not think that anyone in the House will suggest the hard option. I believe that, if we are to make any move to deal with the problem, we will retain the soft option. However, the fundamental difference with the soft option is that, if you do not want to be involved, you register to opt out.

If I went under a bus tomorrow morning, I would not care one iota what was done with my organs. I know that they could be used to improve the lives of other people in Northern Ireland, and I would be delighted. However, I know that some in the Chamber have a different view and, therefore, are not comfortable with the soft option. It has, however, led to a significant increase in the number of donors in the rest of Europe.

Mr Ross: I thank the Member for giving way. He has been very measured in what he is saying. However, will he acknowledge that two countries with the soft or opt-out option, namely Sweden and Norway, do not have better donation rates than the United Kingdom, even though they operate that system?

Mr Wells: That is a valid point, although Spain, which was one of the earlier countries to have an opt-out clause, has had quite a dramatic increase in the number of organs available. So there is considerable variation, and it is not a black-and-white issue as far as —

Ms S Ramsey: I thank the Member for giving way. I know that his time is nearly up. It is important to acknowledge that Spain also appointed hospital transplant co-ordinators to talk to families dealing with critical incidents.

Mr Wells: I agree, and there is a lot of interest in the Spanish model. If we are to consider a review, we will have to look at the situation in Spain.

Unfortunately, I have taken so many interventions that most of my time has gone. I hope that others will be generous during their contribution and allow me to intervene to make a few extra points.

We have one fundamental difficulty in Northern Ireland. Many people put their name down or opt in for organ donations, but, when we consult their relatives, 40% of them say no.

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

Mr Wells: No matter what system we opt for, we will have to deal with that issue.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I beg to move the following amendment: At end insert

“which should consider all options for increasing organ donations and carrying out a clinical ethics consultation on the introduction of an opt-out scheme.”

I welcome the DUP's support for the amendment. I also welcome the DUP motion, as it gives us the chance to debate an extremely important issue.

Any initiative that ensures ethical and sensitive action on increasing organ donation must be supported and embraced

by the House. It is most welcome that the Minister has stated his commitment publicly to increase the number of organ donors in the North. As of two weeks ago, around half a million people residing in Northern Ireland were on the UK organ donor register, and I acknowledge the altruism and foresight of those people. We must also acknowledge the efforts to educate the public on the importance of organ donation and to attract people to sign up as donors. However, although we have seen an undoubted increase in the number of donors, it has not been fast enough and has not managed to address our need. Ironically, the fact that healthcare has improved so much has led to higher life expectancy and, perhaps, a lower rate of registered donors dying. Whatever the situation, hundreds of people are still on waiting lists for life-prolonging, life-improving and life-saving transplants. I know that other Members will focus on the suffering and anguish of those people, and the amendment explicitly sets out to alleviate that suffering.

We cannot let people wait for heart, liver and kidney transplants. They do not have time to wait. Patients with acute liver failure die within 72 hours without a transplant. In the UK in 2006-07, 3,000 patients' lives were saved by receiving an organ transplant. Sadly, 1,000 people died while awaiting such a transplant. We must deal with the issue as a matter of urgency. It truly is a matter of life and death.

Another area that gives us cause for concern is that, in the absence of a sufficient number of deceased donors, there has been an increase in living donation. Although that is a life-saving option for some, unfortunately it carries high risks. The risk to the donor fluctuates depending on the organ, although it is obviously a risk that brave people are prepared to take to save a loved one. However, in the interests of public safety, it is a risk that we want to avoid.

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence has identified the need to consider organ donation as part of the usual end-of-life care planning. It has identified that, when people do not have sufficient capability to make decisions about the end of their life, others should, before death, seek to establish a way to facilitate organ donation that is in a patient's interest. NICE has also identified that consent should be appointed before death or from a representative afterwards. We are duty-bound and morally obliged to explore the options available to increase the number of transplant donors in Northern Ireland.

Recommendations from the organ donation task force stress the importance of organ donation being a UK-wide service, with co-ordination between locally based doctors and co-ordinators across the UK. I also urge further co-ordination and co-operation with the Dublin Government on the issue, and I commend the Minister on his attitude and actions with regard to North/South co-operation on healthcare issues. The Welsh Government are undertaking an approach based on a soft opt-out system that sees the removal and use of organs and tissues as permissible unless the deceased has made his or her objection to that clear during his or her lifetime. This is presumed consent. Now is the time for Northern Ireland to take a similar investigative approach to such options. I am aware that other countries have legislated for an opt-out system for organ donation. In Singapore, for example, the introduction of the Human Organ Transplant Act has seen a huge growth in survival rates through deceased organ donation transplants. Closer to home, European countries have seen similar

correlation between legislation and donation, although, in his intervention, Mr Ross said that that is not always the case. I do not think that, anywhere, an opt-out system on its own will suffice; there has to be ongoing education and co-ordination as well, as Ms Ramsey pointed out.

12.30 pm

We must be cautious of such change, given the fact that, in the UK, in 40% of cases relatives do not consent to donation. It is a very sensitive issue at a very emotional time for families. That highlights the need to ensure that, whatever path we go down, we do so completely ethically and afford sensitivity to the families of diseased people.

Campaigns to promote organ donation and to encourage organ donors are to be supported fully, and I take this opportunity to encourage the public — indeed, every Member — to make sure that they are signed up and to carry a card. You could save or transform someone's life.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately upon the lunchtime suspension. I therefore propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.31 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Strategic Investment Board

1. **Mr Kinahan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when all the appointments to the Strategic Investment Board will be made. (AQO 1358/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): The Strategic Investment Board (SIB) currently consists of a chairman and five non-executive directors. One non-executive director post is vacant because of the resignation of a board member. However, that does not interfere with the operation of the board. In addition to the non-executive directors, the chief executive holds an executive director post on the basis of his position. The current chair of the board is due to complete his term of office in September 2012. Therefore, I expect that current vacancies and the chair's post will be filled by that time. Later this afternoon, the First Minister and I will meet the SIB as part of our routine engagement process. We intend to have formal quarterly meetings with the board.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer. I noted in his answer that there are still some vacancies. Have any other public appointments been outstanding for long periods? If the deputy First Minister cannot list them all now, is it possible to have that in writing?

Mr M McGuinness: Obviously, the supplementary question is more wide-ranging than the original question. Therefore, we will communicate with the Member to inform him of any outstanding appointments.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Given that the current process for appointing the chair of the Strategic Investment Board rests with the board itself, have the Ministers given any consideration to widening the appointment process?

Mr M McGuinness: The simple answer is yes. The current chair's term is due to expire in September 2012. It is our intention that a competition to recruit a replacement for David Dobbin will commence in spring 2012 and that the post will be filled by September 2012. We intend that the appointment of a new chair will be by public competition under the code of practice for public appointments. It is also our intention to recruit for the vacant post on the board at the same time.

Mr Eastwood: What progress has there been in filling current and forthcoming vacancies on the Ilex board?

Mr M McGuinness: Obviously, the Ilex board issue is ongoing. As many people will be aware, the chair of the Ilex board, Sir Roy McNulty, stepped down on 15 February 2012. The competition for a replacement has commenced.

It is hoped that the board's new chair will be in post by the summer. Arrangements are being made with current members of the board for an interim chair.

Mr Speaker: I warn Members that supplementary questions must relate to the original question. The Member just got away with that one. *[Laughter.]*

Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration: Culture

2. **Mr McCarthy** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the role of culture in the programme for cohesion, sharing and integration. (AQO 1359/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: The First Minister and I have shown a great deal of personal leadership to ensure that everyone works together to promote good relations. Our commitment to drive the good relations agenda and collaborative working across political parties has been demonstrated in the establishment of a five-party working group to develop our strategy for good relations. The working group convened on 27 September 2011 and meets weekly. The First Minister and I remain committed to cultural diversity. We recognise that respect and tolerance towards different cultures is a sign of a healthy society. That commitment will be reflected in the cohesion, sharing and integration (CSI) strategy. We are determined to reach agreement on all outstanding issues and hope that the process will conclude soon. All parties must play their part to complete that process. It is an important strategy for the Executive, and we must all focus on the work ahead to ensure that we finalise the CSI strategy soon.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the deputy First Minister for his response. I acknowledge the good work that is being done. As regards the culture of language, will the deputy First Minister tell the House how two separate language strategies instead of one fully comprehensive strategy can contribute to the promotion of a CSI that we can all support?

Mr M McGuinness: I think that the Member will be well aware that the reason for that has its historical roots in previous agreements, as far back as 1998. In the course of the worthwhile discussions that are taking place between the five political parties, there will be an opportunity to air all of those issues. I am fairly confident that the way in which the five parties are working — I understand that there will be a further meeting of the CSI group later this afternoon — will produce a successful resolution to many of the difficult issues that many thought were beyond us. I work on the basis that those things can be resolved and that we can reach agreement. Hopefully, the five parties will be able to sign up to that agreement.

If the Member has a particular concern about any language issue, I would advise him to raise it through the Alliance Party representative on the body that will meet later today.

Mr Humphrey: Does the deputy First Minister agree that, unlike the 'A Shared Future' document, which sought to neutralise in order to create better community relations, the CSI document should reinforce the need for tolerance and celebrate cultural diversity and identity in Northern Ireland?

Mr M McGuinness: I absolutely agree with the Member. Given the circumstances that exist and the journey that we have all travelled over the past five years, in particular, in this institution, it is hugely important that we recognise that issues of cultural expression are central to building a united community that is strengthened by its diversity. Cultural expression must be encouraged in the context of respect, inclusion, interdependence and diversity. It is only when culture is expressed within that framework and in accordance with those principles that we will be able to build a diverse society that is equipped for the future.

I think that we all have to come at this from the perspective of having our own allegiances and aspirations. However, we have to also recognise that others have aspirations and allegiances, and it is hugely important that we all show respect for each other's allegiances. I do not believe that that is beyond us. We have shown by our work in this institution over the past five years, and particularly since the Assembly elections of last year, that we have the ability to work together and to take on challenging issues. I believe that our people, who voted for all the people in this institution, are delighted when they see us reach agreement after agreement on issues that many thought we were incapable of reaching agreement on.

Mr Gardiner: What issues are causing a delay with the processing of CSI?

Mr M McGuinness: The CSI document went out for consultation, and the First Minister and I made it clear from the beginning that we would listen very carefully to the criticisms and other opinions that were expressed about it. That would allow us to face the issues and deal with them in a sensible way. Given that some of the parties were at odds with the original document, I think that the decision to bring all the parties together was sensible. From the discussions that have been held between the parties, it is clear that there are a number of issues that create difficulties and problems — flags is just one example. That body has been in existence since September of last year. It is continuing its work, and the vibes that are coming out of it are encouraging. I hope that we will see a successful outcome sooner rather than later.

I know that there is a temptation among Members to jump into TV studios to debate these issues. As someone who has been involved in negotiations for well over 20 years, I have always found that the most productive dialogue and debate takes place behind the scenes rather than in front of the TV cameras.

FM/DFM: Foreign Direct Investment

3. **Mr McKay** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what visits they are planning this year with a view to attracting foreign direct investment. (AQO 1360/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: Members will be aware that growing the economy and tackling disadvantage is at the heart of our Programme for Government. Attracting and maintaining high-quality foreign economic investors is a key component in that work.

Approximately 14,000 people here are employed by US-owned companies. Our visits to the United States over recent years have played a vital part in securing a wide

range of investments. We have built up important personal relationships with senior executives in a range of companies that are providing a significant number of jobs here, including the New York Stock Exchange, Chicago Mercantile Exchange, Citigroup, HBO and Universal Studios. Just last Friday, the First Minister and I visited the New York Stock Exchange's Belfast operation to meet its global CEO, Duncan Niederauer. The company employs 300 people in the heart of Belfast, and Mr Niederauer reaffirmed our positive working relationship and his company's ongoing commitment to Belfast.

On Sunday, the First Minister and I met the vice-premier of China at an official dinner in Dublin Castle. We will want to develop further that very important relationship in the coming months and years. It is vital that the First Minister and I continue the important work of building relationships and delivering jobs. Next month, we will travel to the United States and Canada over St Patrick's Day, when we will continue to promote our economic strategy at the highest levels of the Obama Administration. We plan to meet the Canadian Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, to build on our strong historical, cultural and economic links.

We also have plans to travel to the economic powerhouses of India and the United Arab Emirates in April, to meet existing and potential investors and to build trade links, ensuring that local firms have all possible assistance in developing export markets. Working closely with other Departments, we are acutely conscious of the importance of putting our economy on the global stage. We plan to do all in our power to harness all opportunities.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer. Certainly, it is important that we encourage not only the growth of foreign direct investment but our indigenous small and medium-sized enterprises. Given the emergence of economic superpowers such as the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) countries, can the deputy First Minister give us an indication of the importance of such countries to trade here, particularly India and the United Arab Emirates, which he mentioned?

Mr M McGuinness: For the past four years, India has been a growing and important market for us in the manufacturing and service sectors. Many companies are now exporting there and a significant number have set up joint ventures and manufacturing partnerships. Others are using the market as a potential source for products and services, helping to improve their cost competitiveness in third markets and sustaining employment here.

Indian companies are major investors and an important source of foreign direct investment for European countries. Invest NI opened its offices in Mumbai in 2007 and has recently expanded its operations to include Bangalore. It should also be noted that GDP growth in the Indian market has averaged over 8% over the past five years, so it is a market with enormous potential. We will also travel to Dubai, which is a key trading hub for local companies, which have been winning new sales for the past 25 years. Dubai has taken on additional global importance as a distribution management hub.

Invest NI has had an office in Dubai since the mid-1990s, and in recent years that has expanded into an incubation centre that supports the accelerated growth of sales by

resident local companies that are offered office space at a very competitive rental cost and assistance in legally employing staff and setting up their presence. Currently, there are six companies in that centre, and, from there, they operate across the region.

Mr G Robinson: If any jobs accrue from foreign direct investment, can we make sure that the north-west benefits from it, particularly Limavady, which has lost so much industry in the past few years?

Mr M McGuinness: We are all very conscious of the way in which the north-west, including Limavady, has been hit by recent job losses. That is something that we have to consider very seriously. Obviously, all Members know that, in the context of Invest NI's work with foreign direct investors, it is the investor who makes the decision about a location. That is why we decided last week that important infrastructural projects such as the construction of the A5, A2 and A8 would go ahead, as well as the important building work at the Ulster Hospital, Altnagelvin Area Hospital and the hospital in Omagh. It is hugely important that we have proper infrastructure in place so that we can attract foreign direct investment. The construction of new roads will appeal to those who are contemplating coming to our shores.

2.15 pm

Mr Swann: Following a previous visit to the US, a statement was made to the House outlining the importance of the creative industries. In light of that, why has the creative industries innovation fund been allocated less money over a longer period? Why is there no mention of the screen industry in either the Programme for Government or the economic strategy?

Mr M McGuinness: Nobody appreciates the importance of the creative industries more than the First Minister and me. It is fair to say that we are spending more money on it now than at any time in the past. Our Programme for Government includes the construction of the new theatre for moviemaking at the Paint Hall, which several millions have been poured into. We have seen a very significant return on our investment. It is estimated that, for every £1 of assistance provided from the public purse, almost £8 of expenditure was generated for the local economy, including wages and salaries of cast and crew, restaurant and hotel bills, facilities hire, transport hire and construction costs. We will continue to encourage the creative industries to come here. The fact that we have proven successful in recent times is testimony to the seriousness with which they take our project.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his answers, particularly his comments about the importance of infrastructure. What is the current situation regarding discussions with the Treasury about corporation tax? Does the Minister agree that a reduction in corporation tax would be a major incentive for Canadian and American firms? PayPal's announcement of 1,000 jobs in the Republic today is a clear indication of the importance of corporation tax.

Mr M McGuinness: All Members will be aware that all parties in the House are absolutely supportive of the need to bring about a reduction in corporation tax. It is very clear from speaking to potential investors on our numerous visits to the United States that devolution of corporation tax powers to us would have a huge impact on attracting

foreign direct investment. Therefore, it is a key priority for us. It is still a work in progress, and there are still meetings taking place. Officials work consistently with the Treasury and others to ensure that we will, hopefully, have a decision sometime this year. It is a vital part of attracting foreign direct investment. As recently as yesterday, the First Minister and I were involved in discussions at the Cabinet Office with the Deputy Prime Minister and representatives of the Scottish and Welsh Administrations. On the margins of that, we had discussions with others about the importance of getting this matter resolved from our perspective.

Ministerial Subcommittee on Children and Young People

4. **Mr Molloy** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the work of the ministerial subcommittee on children and young people. (AQO 1361/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will ask junior Minister Anderson to answer this question.

Ms M Anderson (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): Go raibh míle maith agat. The ministerial subcommittee plays a crucial role in ensuring that the needs of children and young people remain at the heart of the Executive's priorities. It continues to drive forward the implementation of the Executive's 10-year strategy for children and young people. The subcommittee, in developing the new 2012-16 action plan, will deliver on meeting our commitments under the 10-year strategy and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The subcommittee is applying a more strategic approach by identifying and delivering actions that are strongly focused on outcomes and will truly add value and make a real difference to children's lives.

To ensure effective delivery of the action plan, subcommittee members are reviewing the structures. We are simplifying and streamlining those structures to facilitate greater joined-up working within government, involving the right people to deliver on the right outcomes. By integrating efforts across all Departments in that way, we can ensure maximum impact on priority issues so that children's and young people's needs are attended to.

Mr Molloy: I thank the junior Minister for her reply. Will she outline how the Department proposes to work with the newly formed children and young people's strategy and strategic partnership and in the context of the ministerial subcommittee and the action plan emanating from the 10-year children's strategy?

Ms M Anderson: We very much welcome and support the establishment of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership and the work it has done in producing an integrated plan for 2011-14, focused around the six high-level outcomes of our strategy and, as you said, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. We will work with the partnership to identify how best the ministerial subcommittee can support and enhance the work that is being taken forward. We will fully involve the partnership in the review of the structures and in the development of the 2012-16 action plan.

Mr Nesbitt: At the risk of straying too far from the main question: has the Minister had a chance to review the

Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People's response to the Programme for Government with regard to this area, which seems quite critical?

Ms M Anderson: We were very mindful of what the commissioner said. Indeed, we responded to that and refuted some of the comments. Unfortunately, however, those comments were not carried in full. The commissioner is, in fact, mistaken in assuming that the 10-year strategy for children and young people and the Bamford mental health review have been omitted. Both of those important issues are included in the building blocks for the Programme for Government. The document contains several commitments, across a range of priorities, relating especially to children and young people. Those commitments include plans to increase the education performance of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and to support young people into employment by providing training and skills. In addition, we have committed ourselves to implementing an integrated and affordable childcare strategy while ensuring availability of at least one year of preschool education for families who want it. Furthermore, we have stated our intention to reduce child poverty by fulfilling our commitment under the Child Poverty Act 2010.

It is important to note that the Programme for Government is still in draft form and is out for consultation until 22 February. All responses will be considered before agreeing the final document.

Mrs D Kelly: I am disappointed in the junior Minister's reply, because what we are really hearing are recycled commitments, not new ones. If the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is really committed to childcare, why has it not made that a statutory commitment? Can the Minister outline the budget for the implementation of the childcare strategy?

Ms M Anderson: The Member will be aware, as we certainly are, that Mr Agnew from the Green Party is proposing to bring forward a private Member's Bill with regard to children's rights, which will place a statutory duty on Departments and agencies to co-operate in the delivery of services for children. Responsibility for the planning and delivery of children's services is currently a matter for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. Delivery of services is co-ordinated through the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, which comprises all the agencies that are working to improve children's outcomes.

Junior Minister Bell and I have been working very hard to address the issue. We have had a number of meetings with stakeholders and others working in this field. Cross-departmental structures associated with the ministerial subcommittee are driving forward work in a number of areas, including assisting young people who are not in education, employment or training and safeguarding children. It is our intention that the new action plan will include focused cross-departmental intervention and support. The subcommittee is also committed to targeting resources — the Member asked about that — at children and young people who need our help the most. The work that we are doing to identify priorities for the new action plan will assist in the targeting of resources at areas that will provide additional benefits to the most disadvantaged children.

Race Relations

5. **Mr Ross** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the work that is being carried out by their Department to improve race relations. (AQO 1362/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: We remain committed to creating a society in which racial diversity is supported, understood, valued and respected; where racism, in any of its forms, is not tolerated; and where we can all live together as a society and enjoy equality of opportunity and equal protection. We continue to develop a new racial equality strategy by working closely with the sector through the racial equality forum and panel that we established to ensure that the voice and needs of all communities are heard and responded to. We remain committed to supporting the sector through the minority ethnic development fund, which totals almost £1.1 million for the current financial year. That fund has been instrumental in ensuring increasing participation of minority ethnic people in all aspects of our society. We intend to move to a longer-term funding cycle that will allow greater stability in the sector and a more strategic approach to meeting the needs of minority ethnic communities. In addition, we continue to legislate to meet our commitments under the Programme for Government, EU obligations, case law requirements and emerging issues. In the near future, we will bring forward legislation to meet EU obligations to amend the Race Relations Order in order to prescribe the circumstances in which unlawful discrimination in employment under that order applies to seafarers on ships and hovercraft.

We support, and are members of, the Unite Against Hate campaign, and we are working towards a relaunch of a more strategic and in-depth version of the campaign. We are also committed to working closely with the Department of Justice and the Police Service to ensure that we tackle sectarian and racist attacks. We continue to promote Traveller and Roma inclusion, and we welcome the contribution to our economy and society of all minority ethnic people and remain committed to protecting their rights.

Mr Ross: Can the deputy First Minister give a practical example of how the minority ethnic development fund has helped ethnic groups in Northern Ireland to participate more in wider society? How does he see the fund developing as they move towards a longer-term funding model?

Mr M McGuinness: Applications for a newly reshaped minority ethnic development fund, covering a longer funding cycle, will be initiated in the coming months. The fund is being reshaped in line with the results of a detailed evaluation of its operation over the past seven to eight years. We intend that the new fund will take into account many of the issues that groups in the sector raised as part of the evaluation, thereby meeting their needs. We are conscious that any gaps in funding may have a detrimental impact on the sector, and officials are examining options to minimise any such impact.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat. Thank you, Mr Speaker. I welcome the deputy First Minister's comments about the Unite Against Hate campaign. It is important that we do everything that we can to ensure that there is no toleration of attacks in our society. Will the deputy First Minister provide us with more information on that campaign?

Mr M McGuinness: We propose extending both the lifetime of the Unite Against Hate campaign for a further three years and its scope. That will allow us to build on the positive results of the initial campaign. By consolidating the existing co-ordinated multi-agency response to the problem of hate crime here, the campaign aims to raise awareness of the damage that it causes, to lead to a change in the underlying attitudes that facilitate it, to reduce its occurrence and to mitigate its impact.

Mr Durkan: Given recent controversies in the English Premier League, does the deputy First Minister believe that racism is an unsaid problem in parts of the North's sports scene?

Mr M McGuinness: I do not think that it appears to be as big a problem as it is in the English Premier League, but we are all very conscious of the fact that we live in a time when there is ongoing sectarianism and racism and when incidents can flare up at any moment. Therefore, it is essential that we as legislators ensure that we are moving forward in a way that means that we are legislating to ensure that this is stamped out and that we support the police in their apprehension of those who would be involved in such activity, which is so detrimental to our society.

Mr Speaker: Question 6 has been withdrawn.

A5 Dual Carriageway

7. **Mr Doherty** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what discussions they have had with the Minister for Regional Development in relation to the construction of the A5. (AQO 1364/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: We are very pleased that, last week, the Executive agreed a £492 million plan for strategic investment in road infrastructure, including improvements to the A5. Over the next four years, Roads Service can bring forward significant elements of the A5 dual carriageway projects, the sections between Derry and Strabane and Omagh and Ballygawley, along with the A8 Belfast to Larne project and a scheme to dual the A2 Shore Road at Greenisland. Last week's Executive agreement also includes significant upgrades, totalling £90 million, to our healthcare infrastructure in Belfast, Derry and Omagh.

Those schemes will create or safeguard more than 3,000 jobs over the next four years. The generation of a substantial number of construction jobs for the successful contractors and subcontractors will have an immediate impact, and we will all be able to see that. That significant investment will generate an estimated £1.6 billion in additional spending — a major economic boost that will assist the construction sector in a particularly hard time for the industry. Spending will impact on other aspects of the economy, including services, and, through the spending of those in employment, the retail sector. That is a visible manifestation of the Executive working collectively to deliver the commitment of stimulating the economy.

2.30 pm

The A5 road upgrade will develop our international trading opportunities and make us more attractive to inward investment. In particular, engineering and manufacturing clusters in the west will gain easier access to the port of Belfast. Benefits will also be generated by improving

transport links with Derry, specifically opening up Strabane's possibilities, enabling much needed economic development and spin-off jobs locally.

Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr Speaker: Questions 2 and 3 have been withdrawn, and written answers are required.

Flood Prevention

1. **Mr McGimpsey** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the preventative measures her Department is taking to tackle flooding in areas of significant risk. (AQO 1372/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Rivers Agency focuses on three key areas to tackle flooding in areas of significant risk: prevention, protection and preparedness. First, the agency aims to prevent damage from flooding by providing advice to the public and to Department of the Environment (DOE) planning. That enables informed decisions to be taken that should avoid development in areas at risk from flooding. Secondly, the agency provides protection to existing properties at flood risk through the ongoing maintenance of existing drainage and flood-defence systems and, where viable, the construction of new defences. Thirdly, Rivers Agency prepares for flooding by working with key organisations to develop flood-risk management plans and a co-ordinated response to flood events. The updated flood maps also provide information to the public who may be at risk, because that understanding will enable them to be better prepared to react when a flood event occurs. I am convinced that, by working together, we can manage flood risk to reduce its impact on people, property and the environment.

Reducing flooding risk and minimising the damage caused by flooding will continue to be a priority for Rivers Agency. I have made available an additional £1 million funding for 2012-13 to help with flood alleviation measures throughout the North. I am pleased that the additional funding will enable the Ballygawley scheme to start construction this summer. With that additional funding, Rivers Agency has updated its capital programme, and, as a result, the Beragh scheme is scheduled to commence construction in the 2013-14 financial year. It is my intention to seek out every opportunity to secure additional funding for flood-risk management, and, if necessary, I will take that to the Executive.

Mr McGimpsey: I thank the Minister for that comprehensive answer. Bearing in mind that significant flooding has recently occurred in Belfast, particularly south and east Belfast, can she assure the House that watercourses in those areas will be properly maintained to allow the free flow of water? Furthermore, bearing in mind that a key part of the management of flooding was that provided by Belfast City Council, can she assure us that there will be proper ongoing liaison with that council as we work together to ensure protection for those areas of Belfast?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I assure the Member that Rivers Agency will continue to liaise with Belfast City Council on such projects. Regular maintenance is carried out, and areas that have been identified at risk are subject to even more inspections to make sure that, where possible, the risk is minimised. We will continue to work with our partners, whether that is Belfast City Council or DOE.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. What are the next stages of the floods directive for the significant flood-risk areas?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. By December 2013, the Department is required to complete the detail flood-hazard and risk maps for the significant risk areas, which are defined by European regulation. Those maps are even more detailed than those currently available and will clearly identify property and infrastructure that is at flood risk. By December 2014, the Department will also have flood risk-management plans drafted for all those areas, and those will be finalised by December 2015 in line with the requirements of the EU floods directive.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for her answers in relation to Ballygawley and Beragh. Will she outline whether the negotiations with the people of Beragh are going ahead and when the design scheme will be completed?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Member will be aware that, just a number of weeks ago, the Rivers Agency was out once again at a meeting with concerned residents and people who have an interest. Roads Service was also there, along with all the key players who could bring some benefit to the type of project that is needed in Beragh. As I said, as a result of the additional funding that we brought to the Rivers Agency, we can commence that project for construction in 2013-14. All that work is going on at the moment. The detailed scheme design is being worked up, but residents are being fully informed of that process as it goes along.

Broadband: Rural Areas

4. **Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in light of her recent meeting with BT Ireland, how she intends to improve broadband access in rural areas. (AQO 1375/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. As I have stated many times in the House, rural broadband is one of my priorities. Connection to good-quality broadband is more important than ever for businesses in the current economic climate and more so for rural businesses that suffer by virtue of their isolated rural locations. It is a key economic driver, and is recognised as such. It is through broadband that the isolation can be eliminated, or at least reduced, as businesses use the internet to create shop windows for a much wider customer base.

As the Member stated in the question, I met the chief executive of BT Ireland last week to discuss broadband issues, and I have a commitment from him that BT will investigate issues with broadband coverage in rural areas as a priority. It has also undertaken to assist my Department in putting together lower-level analysis of the coverage in rural

areas so that we can best target our resources when we get the opportunity to do so.

To underline my commitment to rural broadband, I have also recently announced that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), through the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) project, will invest £5 million from the rural development programme. It is of the utmost importance to me that that funding be used specifically to target rural areas and areas that we deem as hot spots, where people can only get fewer than two megabytes of lines. We have also started a process to encourage more rural businesses, including farmers, to connect to broadband, but that will work only if they can access existing broadband. Those are the projects that we are looking at. As I said, it will continue to be a priority in the Department.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her extensive answer. I also commend the leadership that she and her Department have shown in trying to target investment into deprived black spots. The extra funding of £5 million will go some way towards making a massive difference. The Minister will be aware of the alternatives to fixed-line broadband, albeit at a premium price. What plans does her Department have to reduce the high cost of broadband in deprived rural areas?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, and thank you for the supplementary question. That is an area that I have looked at. Everybody wants access to fixed-line broadband, and that is right and proper; however, until we reach that stage, people have to avail themselves of satellite services, which are more expensive to install and which carry a higher monthly fee. I have asked officials to look at that.

I want to investigate the merit of running a scheme that could assist people with the installation costs so that they can access the satellite broadband service until such time as they can get the fixed-line service, or if they are convinced of the merits of the satellite service. Often, it is about perceptions as much as anything else. That is something that I have asked officials to do, because I am keen that we get to 100% coverage and that rural people are no longer excluded from that vital service. In this day and age, everybody wants access to broadband.

Mr Frew: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. I know that the rural development programme is now part of the broadband issue, as are the strategic projects that she has asked for throughout the council areas. What has she done to assuage the fears and concerns of the local action group members and joint committee members who have been working on projects so far that their projects will not be pushed aside for those strategic projects and the rural broadband issue?

Mrs O'Neill: I do not look at it as an either/or situation. There are many viable projects, and we are working our way through a long list of applications. It is not a question of either broadband or projects. The fact is that we are in danger of underspending in the rural development programme, so taking in areas such as broadband access was a logical way to enable us to spend that money wisely for the benefit of the wider rural community: the farming community and rural dwellers. We will continue to work with the JCCs and LAGs and ensure that they come on board, but

the measures that I have taken to try to make sure that we encourage as much spend as possible have been broadly welcomed.

Mrs Dobson: I note that the consultation on tranche 3 of the farm modernisation programme includes the possibility of increased points for online submissions. Does the Minister think that it is fair that farmers without broadband access, who have, it could be argued, greater need to modernise, could be penalised when trying to apply?

Mrs O'Neill: We are encouraging as many farmers as possible to fill out all applications and forms online. I recognise the problem of not everybody having access to broadband, and that is why it is available in our DARD Direct offices, which, as you will know, are scattered across the North. We hope that nobody will be left out because they cannot access broadband to apply online. Our services are there for people to use.

Farm Modernisation Programme

5. **Mr Murphy** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline any plans she has for tranche 3 of the farm modernisation programme. (AQO 1376/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The farm modernisation programme has proved to be extremely popular with and beneficial to the farming community, and news of the third tranche has been much anticipated. That is why I announced last week that, in line with my Department's equality scheme, a consultation on the equality impact assessment (EQIA) of tranche 3 will run until 18 April.

Total funding of £5.5 million has been announced, which is an increase of £1.4 million on the amount previously announced. That will provide significant support and a much-needed boost to farmers and the wider economy in the current difficult economic climate. The third tranche of the farm modernisation programme will open when the EQIA consultation exercise, administrative procedures and scheme documentation are complete. My intention is to retain a simplified application and assessment process, ensuring that red tape is kept to a minimum.

Mr Murphy: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra. I concur with the Minister's view that it has been a very popular programme, and I am heartened that she is intent on keeping the red tape involved to a minimum. The programme has been of significant benefit to farmers and the rural economy. Will the Minister outline whether there is likely to be a tranche 4 of the farm modernisation programme?

Mrs O'Neill: The current focus is on getting tranche 3 out and getting farmers to apply. However, I will continue to monitor the spend on all parts of the rural development programme from now until 2015 and make any changes that might be necessary. I also want to look at the effects of tranches 1 to 3 and take into account any recommendations from their analysis. When we have developed the agrifood strategy, for example, issues might be identified that tranche 4 could benefit. We will keep it under review, but my mind is not closed to opening tranche 4 if we can.

Mrs D Kelly: The Minister outlined what has to be done. However, given that her predecessor announced tranche 3

funding last year, will she explain why there has been such a delay? When will we know the definitive date on which tranche 3 funding will be made available to farmers?

Mrs O'Neill: Part of the delay was because I had to seek approval from the European Commission to amend the rural development programme in order to make the funding available. I received that approval late last year and immediately went out to consultation with stakeholders in November and December. We turned it around pretty quickly in that we were able to launch the EQIA last week. We will, hopefully, be able to launch very soon after that finishes, which I expect to be by 18 April. While the EQIA is ongoing, we are updating and pricing the list of eligible equipment. Therefore, no time is being wasted in getting the scheme up and running as quickly as possible.

2.45 pm

Mr I McCrea: The Minister referred to the £5.5 million and gave an update on some of the dates. Will she detail if she has had any discussions with banks and moneylenders in respect of ensuring that when the £5.5 million is available, it can be spent, and that money that needs to be borrowed will be available?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Officials have been working with stakeholders, which is anyone who is involved in the process. When the scheme is launched, it will be important that people can avail themselves of the funding as quickly as possible. There will be small grants of £500 right up to £4,000, so, hopefully that will make it accessible to everybody and they will be able to get involved, no matter what sector of the industry they are involved in.

Mrs Overend: The eventual announcement of tranche 3 is very welcome. Will the Minister indicate whether she believes, as her permanent secretary said, that it will soak up demand for small-scale grants? I am also interested to hear her initial thoughts on tranche 4.

Mrs O'Neill: I will take those questions in reverse. In respect of tranche 4, as I said, the agrifood strategy will be a good opportunity to identify challenges and issues for the industry, which may help us to shape the thinking of what tranche 4 will be. However, my priority for the minute is to get tranche 3 opened and get people to use the funding.

In respect of your first question around selection criteria, some of the things that I want to bring out at tranche 3 include getting young farmers and young people in the farming community to avail of succession-type grants. Therefore, we are looking at prioritising the points that will be awarded for young farmers coming forward. That is something that the industry very much welcomes.

Animal Welfare: Slaughterhouses

6. **Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline how her Department safeguards the welfare of animals in slaughterhouses. (AQO 1377/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Welfare of animals at slaughter or killing is subject to the requirements of European directive 93/119/EC, which is implemented in the North by the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1996. The

directive sets out the basic requirements for the operation of slaughterhouses in order to prevent any unnecessary suffering for animals prior to and during the slaughter process.

Veterinary officers from my Department, as official veterinarians, are present in all approved slaughterhouses during times of slaughter each day and as part of regular audits. The official vet's role includes verification that the slaughterhouse operator fulfils their full obligations under the directive. Most establishments here have designated animal welfare officers to ensure high welfare standards, and I very much welcome that.

In addition to the inspection of all animals ante-mortem, the official vet conducts checks throughout the day to confirm that animal handling and treatment from time of arrival until time of death is appropriate to the species and complies with legal requirements.

Enforcement action is taken where necessary. That may include verbal or written advice or warnings, or, when necessary, a recommendation for prosecution. If official vets see animals arriving at a slaughterhouse showing evidence of welfare problems having arisen on a farm or during transport, the incident will be reported immediately and the necessary follow-up action will be taken.

To ensure that animals are killed humanely, no person can slaughter animals in a slaughterhouse here without going through an assessment and licensing process. Slaughtermen are licensed by my Department under the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1996, which ensure that anyone who handles animals in a slaughterhouse has an adequate level of knowledge, training and competence.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Minister for her answer. I am sure that the Minister will be aware that some legislators have taken action to ensure that there is mandatory CCTV in some slaughterhouses. I wonder if that is a direction in which her Department will consider going in the future.

Mrs O'Neill: There is no evidence in the North to suggest that compulsory CCTV should be introduced. There are 20 slaughterhouses here, and 13 have already installed CCTV. A further two plants have CCTV in place but not in the stunning area. There are five remaining meat plants, but they are small.

Last year, I met Animal Aid campaigner Kate Fowler, and we discussed the implementation of CCTV in slaughterhouses. I made the point that I would consider it and keep it under review if I felt that it was necessary. I know that other legislators are looking at the issue. In the South, they have no plans to bring in compulsory CCTV. I know that, in Britain, there have been a number of highly publicised cases. However, I think that you have to look at it in a different context, because we are very local here, and we have a vet in every slaughterhouse who sees the process through. At this stage, I am not convinced of the need for CCTV.

Mr Cree: This is a specialist subject for me. Is the Minister aware of the considerable concern for the welfare of the industry that exists among farmers due to the proposed introduction of the full-cost recovery of fees for meat inspections in slaughterhouses? I understand that such fees do not apply in the Republic of Ireland.

Mrs O'Neill: I am aware of the issue that the Member raised. It is not directly related to the question, so I am happy to write to him about it. We are always very mindful of the costs, and we are always very mindful that costs should not be put on to the farmer. I have raised that issue with other Departments. I am happy to write to the Member and to keep him up to date with what is happening with that matter.

Rural Poverty

7. **Ms J McCann** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the main elements of the programme to tackle rural poverty and rural isolation. (AQO 1378/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Under the DARD anti-poverty and social inclusion framework, a package of measures worth £10 million was successfully implemented over the 2008-09 to 2010-11 Budget period. Following agreement of the 2011-12 to 2014-15 Budget, I confirmed my commitment to tackling rural poverty and social isolation by allocating £16 million to build on the successes of the early work and develop other interventions. I am delighted to say that tomorrow I will be launching the revised tackling rural poverty and social isolation strategy and the associated action plan. Those will set out in detail the focus of that important work and how it will work out over the next Budget period.

I am pleased to say that, over the past 10 months, intervention on the ground has continued through the provision of concessionary travel for SmartPass holders on rural community transport; maximising access to grants, benefits and services by supporting home visits by trainer enablers to our most vulnerable rural households; funding the rural support charity to provide assistance to rural families and farms facing difficulties; and rural community development regional and local support of over 800 groups. In that period, the development of rural schemes has been ongoing, and I am pleased to announce today that all those schemes have acquired the necessary approvals, with activity under way or due to commence in this financial year. So, I think that those are an exciting range of projects, and I look forward to bringing them to fruition in the time ahead.

Ms J McCann: I thank the Minister for her answer, the detail she gave and the specific action that she is considering to tackle rural poverty and exclusion. Has the Minister been working with other Departments on the issue?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes. I thank the Member for the supplementary question. It is key that we set out the strategy, the action plan and what we want to achieve, but we also have to leverage in funding from other Departments. Some of the projects that I will be launching tomorrow are testimony to that. We are going to work with the Public Health Agency in getting into farmers' marts and rural communities to carry out health checks. However, there are other schemes. We will work with the Department for Social Development on a fuel poverty initiative and try to increase the energy efficiency measures of hard-to-reach and hard-to-heat homes. I think that those are all positive examples.

There is a new initiative on boreholes for people who cannot get access to safe drinking water. We are going to announce a scheme with the Department for Regional Development.

That scheme will allow people to be able to access funding and to get access to mains water, which, in this day and age, you would think most people would automatically have, but, in fact, some do not.

So, I am excited by the project that we have launched, and I look forward to seeing it through. Key to the delivery of all this is working in partnership with other Departments.

Mr Beggs: Does the Minister acknowledge that successful rural primary schools that are integrated into their local community play a significant role in reducing rural isolation and rural poverty? What representations has the Minister made to the Minister of Education to ensure that that is taken into consideration as the future of primary schools is being assessed?

Mrs O'Neill: The Minister of Education can speak for himself, but he is very aware of the benefit of a rural primary school and the wider benefits it brings to that community. I know that he will be mindful of that when he is taking any decisions on the way forward. I am from a rural community, so I am aware of how our school is the community centre. It is all those things to the rural community. I am sure that the Minister of Education is also very mindful of that.

Mr McCarthy: Officials from the grant-giving bodies visited the Agriculture Committee a number of weeks ago. Concern was expressed that, although applications were coming in, quite a lot had been returned or refused for one reason or another. Is the Minister content that applications are being encouraged, and as much finance is going to rural development as is required?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I assume that the Member refers to the rural development programme and how that money is being spent. As I said before in the House, I am eager to ensure that every penny of that money is spent and not a penny is returned to Europe. I took action to try to get the local rural development groups to deal with all the applications that they have on the table because some are sitting with quite a backlog. We have seen a really good improvement in that over the past couple of months since I took that action. I commend the groups for responding.

It is vital that we get that money spent in the best way in our rural communities. That is my intention and that of all the groups administering the fund.

Mr Durkan: Are any specific programmes targeted at rural youth, given the high levels of youth unemployment and emigration?

Mrs O'Neill: Absolutely. I am quite excited about the new youth employability programme that we are about to launch as part of a wider package. It involves taking in young people who have been out of work for some time and working with industry partners; so businesses are getting involved. It will help to develop young people's core skills, which, hopefully, will give them that wee bit of confidence and encourage them to get back into the workplace. Taking part in that training will give them some skills to take back to the workplace.

Market Gardening

8. **Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans she has to develop the market gardening sector. (AQO 1379/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department already provides considerable support to the commercial and amenity horticulture sectors.

College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) development advisers work closely with horticulture growers. They provide business support for vegetable, protected crops, top fruit, soft fruit and amenity horticulture crops, including ornamental crops and cut flowers. They deliver training, knowledge and technology transfer, and business development planning support to the horticulture industry. CAFRE staff also offer support through the provision of benchmarking and business development packages.

Recently, my Department assisted the top fruit and the potato sectors to achieve recognition under the EU protected food name scheme. New season Comber potatoes/Comber earlies and Armagh Bramleys have achieved protected geographical indication (PGI) status under EU law.

DARD supports the growth and development of the agrifood sector through the implementation of the rural development programme. One element of that is the EU agricultural and forestry processing and marketing grant scheme. To date, the Department has paid £5.03 million to support horticulture related projects under that scheme. The processing and marketing grant (PMG) scheme is open for applications until 24 February.

Representatives from the horticulture industry had the opportunity to input to the list of items included under tranche 3 of the farm modernisation programme. They are also included in the consultation process. A range of horticulture related items has also been supported in previous tranches of the programme.

The Department supports co-operation and collaboration within the horticulture industry. I recently attended a meeting with the Horticulture Forum and gave a commitment to ensure ongoing support for it. In addition, DARD, in conjunction with the Countryside Agri-Rural Partnership, manages the supply chain development programme. That programme supports growers working together to improve their supply chains.

Mr McNarry: I thank the Minister again. I did not need to ask her for a plug for Comber spuds, and I thank her for recognising that that status has been given to that particular part of the industry. It greatly advances our agricultural food business in that area. Can she say specifically, if not now, perhaps in written answer, what promotion and marketing tools are available from her Department to the market growers and gardeners?

Mrs O'Neill: I outlined in my initial answer some of the areas of support that the Department provides. However, I am happy to write to the Member and give him more detail on the ins and outs of it. The processing and marketing grant scheme has been very beneficial to the sector. I am happy to give the Member more detail on that.

3.00 pm

Private Members' Business

Organ Donation

Debate resumed on amendment to motion:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to undertake a review of organ donation. — [Mr Wells.]

Which amendment was:

At end insert:

"which should consider all options for increasing organ donations and carrying out a clinical ethics consultation on the introduction of an opt-out scheme." — [Mr Durkan.]

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome this debate on organ donation. In contrast to yesterday's debate, in fairness to DUP Members, they are not going to divide the House today. This is a very important motion.

We need to recognise, as I am sure the Minister will do so, the huge gift that those who donate their organs give to people across this island. Due to organ donation, there are many men, women and children, not only across this island but across the world, who have received the opportunity of a new life. As the proposers of the motion and the amendment touched on, the impact on people who receive an organ donation cannot be underestimated. The impact on those who take the ultimate step of allowing the organs of their loved ones to be donated should not be underestimated either.

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

There are a lot of issues around this subject in society. The proposer of the motion highlighted some statistics from across the world. I am in favour of organ donation, but I am not in the position in which a loved one of mine has just died. So, when we look at the opt-in and opt-out issue, we also need to look at education and how we let people know at such a vulnerable time in their lives that being involved in organ donation gives the gift of life or the gift of a better life to others. It is important that we recognise the human aspect involved.

The proposer of the motion mentioned the thousands of people who are on the organ donor register in the North. However, when you compare that with statistics across the world, and I thank the people from Research and Information Service for the information they gave us, our rate of registration is probably one of the lowest. We also have people who genuinely, for a number of reasons, do not agree with organ donation. As I said, there has to be a balance between allowing people to grieve after suffering such a traumatic experience and allowing them to take part.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Ms S Ramsey: I will give way, because you gave way to me earlier.

Mr Wells: Does the Member accept that the vast majority of people who do not sign up for organ donation have no great moral or philosophical problems with it: they just never get round to doing it? There are very few people in the United Kingdom or the Irish Republic who have a moral problem with donating their organs. It is because of apathy that they do not sign up. Therefore, surgeons day and daily are dealing with people who have perfectly good organs that they cannot use because those folk never got round to signing up.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Ms S Ramsey: I agree with Mr Wells. Organ donation is not a discussion that we have in general with our families. People do not say, "Tonight I am going to discuss with my family what they want to happen to their organs when they die". A lot of people do not like to talk about death.

The other issue is that, unless we have that conversation and start that education process, we will be faced with this problem year in and year out. If one of my loved ones died, I would be unsure of what they wanted, so I would be afraid to make a decision. So, it is right that we have that conversation, strategy and education process and that we start them at an early age.

Organ donation has had a bad time over the past number of years. In this jurisdiction, we have had the organs retention inquiry. So, some people shy away from it now. If we start the conversation about organ donation earlier, it will become part of everyday life and will not be something that people do not want to talk about.

Mr McClarty: Does the Member accept that an opt-out situation forces people to make a decision on whether to opt out or let their organs go forward for donation?

Ms S Ramsey: Probably, but there are a multitude of reasons. If you look at the motion, the issue is about looking at all of these scenarios in their context. People in Spain were given the opportunity to opt in or opt out and that did not necessarily make a difference. However, employing people to deal with families and act as a family liaison officer at that critical and crucial time has increased organ donation in Spain by, I think, 30%.

Allowing that to happen was one step, but it was not the biggest step needed. Other issues and factors needed to come into play. We need a holistic approach at an earlier age. When we spoke about cancer 10 years ago, it was whispered. Now that we have had education and information, people are talking about the survival rate for cancer. Cancer is no longer —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Ms S Ramsey: I support the motion and the amendment.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the proposers for bringing the motion to the House to enable us to debate an issue that is very close to my heart. I speak not only as an MLA but as a mother of a successful kidney transplant patient. Three years ago, my youngest son, Mark, had a kidney transplant.

If Members will indulge me for a moment, I would like to speak briefly about his story.

Mark suffered from kidney disease since he was born, but when he was 13 years old he entered renal failure. He was told that he would need to undergo a transplant operation within one to three years. At home, we had always lived with Mark's kidney disease and adapted our lives around it, but I cannot relay the emotional shock it delivers to a family to hear that your son needs to undergo life-saving surgery at such a very early stage of his life.

However, Mark is one of the lucky ones. He waited for 10 months for a successful donor organ to be found, and in February 2009, aged 15, he underwent the five-and-a-half-hour overnight operation at the Royal Hospital for Sick Children. We do not know who the donor of Mark's kidney was, and we probably never will. Even so, we thank their family every single day for giving Mark the gift of life. As they endured the indescribable grief of losing a loved one, through donating an organ they gave the selfless gift that enabled us to have a healthy and fit son who is able to enjoy life to the full.

Since his transplant, Mark and I have visited and become friends with countless dialysis patients and their families to give advice and to talk about his experience at what can be for them an extremely traumatic time. I think particularly at this minute about Justin and Sharon Weir, constituents of mine from Donaghcloney.

Patients struggle daily with the physical effects, mental trauma and considerable financial loss, which for many comes from being unable to work. The end result is low self-esteem and the stressful cycle of enduring what seems like endless medical treatment. It is heartbreaking to watch patients go through the daily routine of being on dialysis, with the long journeys to hospital and the never-ending wait for the phone to ring with the news that an organ has become available.

As a family, we endured that wait, and nothing quite prepares you for the elation of finally receiving that call. However, I know many patients through our charity work who are into their second decade waiting to receive an organ. I think in particular of one such patient, a colleague of mine, William Johnston, from Bangor, of the Northern Ireland Kidney Patients' Association. That highlights the extreme importance of increasing organ donor numbers.

The House and, specifically, the Health Minister must take all necessary steps to increase the number of available organ donors and to build on the hard work and tireless dedication of so many local people who give freely of their time to promote organ donation. That includes the work of the charities of the Transplant Forum and the Public Health Agency.

Mr Wells: I make this intervention because I want to hear the end of your speech.

Mrs Dobson: Thank you very much.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mrs Dobson: We must be absolutely certain that the steps we take will not damage their vital work or lead in any way to

a loss of trust among the public in relation to the donation of organs.

Last Friday, 'The Economist' published an article on that issue, which highlighted a staggering statistic: although 90% of the British public approve of organ donation, only 30% have signed up. In our local trust, I am aware that we have regional clinical leads and nurses who are specifically trained in organ donation, and that each trust has an organ donation committee in place. That is a start, but we must build on that important work if we are to see organ donor numbers rise dramatically. At the moment, the numbers are rising, but far too slowly.

Last year, as a newly elected MLA, I was proud to launch here at Stormont the Transplant Games, which were held in Belfast. The publicity generated from the games enabled Northern Ireland to reach the very significant local milestone of half a million donors on the register. However, as I said, we need to do more to maintain that momentum.

As I speak to patients waiting for transplants, transplant recipients, clinicians and organ volunteers, I continue to hear the incredibly persuasive argument for more and more trained transplant co-ordinators to operate at our hospitals and local health facilities. Through their specialised training, they can speak directly to families going through an extremely traumatic time to discuss organ donation and how the death of their loved one can pass new life on to another.

There are 288 local people currently waiting for a transplant. No one knows if or when they will join those numbers. I urge people to ask themselves one question: if you are prepared to receive an organ to save your life, are you prepared to give an organ to save someone else's? A fact that most people do not know is that —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mrs Dobson: On behalf of my family and families across Northern Ireland, I appeal directly to the Minister to raise awareness and channel all his efforts to increase the number of organ donors.

Mr McCarthy: If ever there was a reason for people to donate organs, Jo-Anne Dobson's story, which we heard today, is one. We thank her very much for sharing that with us. I wish her every success in her work as she goes along, and that her son will make a good life for himself, as I am sure he will. His family must be proud of him.

I thank the Members for bringing this important issue to the Assembly, and the amendment, which we support.

We can all play our part in the promotion of organ donation in Northern Ireland. As Jo-Anne told us, 288 people in Northern Ireland are awaiting the life-saving gift of an organ, which, if received, could help them to live with their loved ones for many years. I have enormous sympathy and hope for all those who find themselves in that position. By highlighting the issue in the Assembly today, I hope that progress can be made and, sooner rather than later, many more organ donors will come forward, thus saving the life of as many patients as possible. I pay tribute to all the medical staff involved. I am sure that Jo-Anne would agree that the doctors, consultants and all the people involved in getting Mark back to health have to be congratulated, and we give them all the support that they deserve.

Northern Ireland has always been regarded as a region where people are caring and generous. I have no doubt that, if given all the information on safeguards, dignity, etc, our people will continue to give. If the motion is passed, and I have no reason to believe that it will not be, and a review is undertaken with all scenarios taken into consideration, I am sure that our people in Northern Ireland will respond positively.

Presently, as I understand it, the donor card is the main method of getting people to sign up. It has worked satisfactorily until now, and we must thank all those government organisations that push for organ donation through their correspondence. I am sure that Members know what I am talking about. When you get an application form for a driving licence, for instance, you have the opportunity to sign up to be a donor. We are very grateful for that.

3.15 pm

The amendment calls for the consideration of:

"all options for increasing organ donations".

It also refers to the "introduction of an opt-out scheme". I can go along with that, as long as every possible precaution is taken. There can be absolutely no room for error. It was, I think, Sue Ramsey who mentioned an incident that I recall from a number of years ago. After the unfortunate deaths of their babies, some parents discovered to their horror that, without any discussion, debate or permission, the children's organs had been stored for future use. That caused an outcry. Sue mentioned that during the review of organ donation at the time.

Mr Wells: Does the Member accept that there is a world of difference between the organs of a child being taken for experimentation without the parents being consulted and someone voluntarily giving their organs to enhance the life of someone else after their death? I do not think that we should muddy the waters by trying to compare the two. They are totally different.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McCarthy: I take the point.

Ms S Ramsey: As the Minister is here, I want to mention the process of education. Unfortunately, when the donation or retention of organs is mentioned, we think of the bad issues. Education of the public is important, and I agree with the Member's intervention.

Mr McCarthy: I just mentioned that incident because the last thing that we want is for people to suffer any more than they already have. I know that, for the parents, it was like their baby was dying for a second time, and some of those affected came to me. We must take every precaution, regardless of what direction we take. We want organ donations to increase, but every precaution has to be taken. The situation that I described must never happen again, as it would make people uneasy, suspicious and more likely simply to say no to organ donation. I am against such horrendous situations, and I would be totally against any plan to remove organs without the family's permission.

As the Deputy Chair of the Health Committee said, in Wales, the result of consultation on the opt-out system is anxiously awaited, and, after that, the publication of the report. Our

population could digest the outcome of those and make better decisions.

I pay tribute to the 'Belfast Telegraph' for its Sign Up, Save a Life campaign last year. Now, the number of people signed up to save a life here stands at over 0.5 million. That is a fantastic result, and I appeal to everyone to continue with that.

In conclusion, I support the motion and the amendment, and I hope that the review will be positive and help to save the lives of people who depend on a donor to remain with their families for many years to come.

Mr Dunne: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the very important matter of organ donation. It is a very sensitive issue, and it is right and proper that we have a mature and sensible debate. It is welcome news that organ donation is on the increase throughout the United Kingdom. However, there is still room for improvement. The reality is that transplants save lives.

Organ donation is a very delicate issue, and we need to take great care not to increase the trauma of already grief-stricken loved ones when death comes to a family. Sadly, the statement rings true that in the middle of life, we are in death.

Obviously, one major element of a review of organ donation would be the possibility of introducing an opt-out system, which Wales is seeking to introduce. I have reservations about presumed consent on such a sensitive issue as organ donation. I believe that donation should be a gift, not a duty. Doctors have also raised concerns about the slack definition of death required to harvest organs. We must be cautious and ensure that the need for organs does not compromise the care of those who are critically ill.

There is also concern from Churches and other organisations over presumed consent of organ donation. Those concerns need to be taken on board in any review of organ donation in Northern Ireland. The Archbishop of Wales, Dr Barry Morgan, has warned of an opt-out system undermining the positive image of organ donation. He stated:

"Giving organs is the most generous act of self giving imaginable but it has to be a choice that is freely embraced, not something that the state assumes."

One of the most effective measures in improving donation rates is to promote public awareness of the importance of organ donation. As with many public health issues, more could be done to educate our young people on the subject. That could be done in schools and in further and higher education institutions, but it could be extended to workplaces and community organisations. We should be doing more to sell the benefits of organ donation and make known the dangers of not thinking seriously about it, which often happens as a result of a lack of knowledge.

Many do not think seriously enough about organ donation during their life, and I am sure that it is only when people find themselves in a position of critical need that they begin to think seriously about it, and then it can often be too late. The profile of the current donation system and organ donor register could be greatly increased, and there should be greater public awareness of the register right across the age profile of people here. The current Carry the Card campaign could be evolved and improved, having become somewhat outdated. It should be more user-friendly and interactive,

with greater use made of IT and mobile phone facilities, all aimed at reaching more potential donors and making donation more socially acceptable. A television campaign would go a long way to increasing that social acceptance. More could also be done to make transplants more effective. Northern Ireland has a particularly low conversion rate, which needs to be improved.

Organ donation is a complex issue. Any review should take on board all views and assess the benefits of a range of measures before taking any rash decisions, which could do more to damage public health than improve it. I support the motion and the amendment.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I, too, support the motion and the amendment. As Gordon said, this is a very complex subject. I have to say that it is something that I did not really understand a lot about until I read some of the information.

I have attended the transplant group at Daisy Hill Hospital, where there is a very good renal unit, which people from the Twenty-six Counties also access. I talked to people in the group. I have a school friend who had a transplant and takes part, very successfully, in the transplant games. I also had a colleague who donated a kidney to his father. However, organ donation is something that living donors should decide themselves to do. Where a family is put in a position in which they have to make a decision, obviously that decision becomes that much harder.

I did not understand a couple of things, although perhaps I have not yet heard the answer. I presume that, as they get older, people's organs become less effective for organ donation. Therefore, I also presume that younger people are continually needed to sign up for organ donation, and age is a thing that I do not think that anybody — *[Interruption.]*

If I can make the point before Mr Wells gets up, because he might want to comment, I thought it a very magnanimous gesture for him to say earlier that he does not care what happens to his organs after he passes away. However, I am sure that we may find a few wee caveats in his will as to whom they may or may not go. I will give way.

Mr Wells: I do not think that the donor card allows you to state who your organs go to.

Mr Weir: Not Mickey Brady.

Mr Wells: Yes, not Mickey Brady. I do not think that that would be on the card. However, there are some of us who would like a transplant of his hair at some stage.

To return to being serious about this important issue, my understanding is that the liver regenerates. In fact, Dr Karl Partridge, who spoke to me this morning, got the liver of a 63-year-old, and it is functioning perfectly well and will last him a lifetime. Therefore, for some organs, no, it does not matter what age the person is, provided the liver is in good working order.

Mr Brady: I thank the Minister — the Member — for his intervention. Sorry; Freudian slip. I think that there was more concern about to whom your organs might not go, as opposed to whom they might. I will leave that there.

There are other issues. People who have had blood transfusions cannot subsequently give blood. I wonder

whether there are issues around that, and I am sure that someone will be able to inform us about that later. It is certainly a very complex subject. I ask the Minister to consider that.

Although an opt-out system would put more people on the donor list, and should be supported, I think that the biggest problem is getting the next of kin to agree to transplantation, because tragic circumstances pertain at that time, particularly when relatives get bad news, usually as a result of an accident. People may not be in the right frame of mind at such times to agree to donation.

The relevant point was mentioned that Spain has introduced a system of having transplant co-ordinators in every emergency hospital. That could happen at trauma units here. Transplant committees in trusts have also been mentioned, and that is obviously a great step forward. Those people are trained in grief counselling to talk to relatives of donor-card holders. As was mentioned, Spain introduced the opt-out scheme 10 years ago but saw only a modest increase in donations. However, since the new system was introduced, there has been an increase of over 30% in the number of organs for harvest. That is the kind of model that the Minister could look at to increase the number of donations, because it is a very sensitive and delicate subject. Obviously, the way forward needs to be treated sensitively.

Mr Ross: Irrespective of one's views of the merits or otherwise of an opt-out system, we, of course, should — I think that this debate will — encourage a greater understanding of the issues. We should educate more people about the need for donations and ensure that the current system is made more effective and efficient. We should, of course, encourage those who wish to do so to carry a donor card but, more importantly, as other Members said, encourage them to talk to their loved ones so that they know what those individuals' wishes are in the event of death.

I certainly encourage the Minister to examine how we can encourage more people to get on the organ donation register, but I also encourage him to investigate whether the present system is efficient enough and to ensure that we get a translation from potential organ donations to actual transplant stage. However, I have a number of concerns about moving towards a model of presumed consent, and I wish to focus my remarks on those. My colleague Mr Dunne said that it is about a competing argument between whether it is a gift — I listened to the moving speech by Jo-Anne Dobson about the gift of life — or whether it is a duty. I believe that moving towards a system of opt-out raises some serious questions about the power and the role of the state over the individual. One would have thought that some Members would have cherished the principles of the Magna Carta and the limitations of the state over the individual and shown more resistance to moving towards a position in which the state assumes ownership of people's organs. It cannot be stated in strong enough terms that presumed consent is not actual consent. It is very important that we take note of that.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr Ross: Certainly.

Mr Wells: Aligned to that would be a register, held in Northern Ireland, which anyone who had problems with presumed consent could join to make it absolutely clear

that their organs could never be used in any circumstances. Surely that is the safeguard, provided it is properly advertised and people are aware of it. That would prevent the state from assuming ownership of organs, and that, surely, must be worth considering for the future.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Ross: I thank the Member for his comments and, indeed, for his balanced tone, but I would not be confident that an individual's failure to opt out of the system should be taken as informal consent. In fact, we could not be sure that it is not because of a lack of understanding of the system, the policy or the process. We cannot take that as consent, which is a key issue. Indeed, I think that we could place additional burdens on grieving family members rather than removing it.

I turn to some other issues that have been mentioned. First, the vast majority of people support a move to an opt-out system. I read the British Medical Association's remarks, which quoted a figure of 90% of people being in favour of presumed consent.

It is reasonable to assume that, if that were the case, those people would have no difficulty in carrying donor cards. If they do not carry them, we have to find out why. What can we do to encourage the individuals who support this system to carry donor cards? If we could encourage them to do so, there would be no need to move towards a presumed consent model.

3.30 pm

It is also important that we challenge some of the statistical presumptions that we have heard. There is an assumption, which I heard during the debate, that moving to an opt-out system would automatically increase the level of organ donation. I cited the two examples of Norway and Sweden, where, although there is an opt-out system, there are lower rates of donation than here in the United Kingdom. I listened to the point that Ms Ramsey and Mickey Brady made. They are correct: often, Spain is cited as having a higher level of donation. People credit that to an opt-out system, but the reality is much more complex. Closer examination reveals that Spain's higher rate has less to do with the legal framework in which it operates and more to do with the donation and retrieval system, a high level of public awareness and, indeed, some of the measures that have been put in place, to which the two Members referred. Indeed, the 1979 legislation, which was introduced to move towards presumed consent, lay dormant for many years, and no opt-out register was ever created. The real impact was those key organisational changes in the late 1980s.

There are also questions about whether moving to an opt-out system would deliver the anticipated outcome. The former Prime Minister Gordon Brown established the organ donation task force in the final years of his Government. Its report was published in 2008, and it made it absolutely clear that presumed consent was unlikely to increase organ donation in the United Kingdom and, indeed, risked diverting substantial resources. It would have cost around £45 million to set up and many more millions of pounds in subsequent years. The task force feared that it would divert money from other areas, money that could be used to promote organ donation.

Even more significantly, the task force's members came to the review of presumed consent with an open mind. They were happy enough to go along with moving towards that system. However, after examining the evidence, they determined that the benefits of moving towards presumed consent were less obvious and that the entire issue of donations was a multidimensional one that could not be taken so simply. Crucially, that task force reached clear consensus, which was that an opt-out system should not be introduced and could impact negatively on donation rates.

The other very important issue that the Assembly must look at is that of potential donors becoming actual donors, which other Members also mentioned. NHS Blood and Transplant documented in its 2010-11 activity report that, in some cases, around 90% of potential donations were lost because medical staff failed to approach family members for consent or authorisation or because other criteria were not met. That is an alarmingly high rate. We can, therefore, confidently deduce that there are massive inefficiencies in the process used by health authorities throughout the UK.

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

Mr Ross: If those inefficiencies were improved, even by a fraction, there would be no need for a move towards presumed consent.

The Minister should examine all possibilities, and, of course, that is his responsibility. However, I urge caution and ask him to resist moving towards a position in which he legislates for the state having further control over individuals and a system not proven to improve donation rates.

Mr McCallister: Contributions to the debate from around the House have been very interesting. At least, there is one common thread: all Members agree that we need to do something so much better. Mr Wells, in his opening remarks, set out some sad statistics and facts. Every year, for example, 17 people are lost. We heard a moving story from my colleague Jo-Anne Dobson about her very personal experience with her son Mark.

Of the issues on which I want to focus, the principal one is ensuring that, whatever happens, the wishes of individuals are met and respected. Sadly, that does not happen at present. The fact is that the families of 40% of people who carry a donor card subsequently refuse to let the organs be used. That is a pretty alarming statistic, notwithstanding the very difficult times in which such decisions are made. All of us in the Chamber and beyond — those who watch or listen to the debate later — should always be thinking about having that conversation with their family. That point was made by other Members, but it needs to be reiterated. People must make sure that their family, their next of kin and their loved ones are in absolutely no doubt as to what their wishes are. Carrying a card may not be enough when the percentage is 40%. People should have that discussion with their loved ones so that there is no question about their views. I hope that it never happens to anyone — no one ever does — but you never know; therefore we want our views to be well known to those who have to make that decision.

The debate about presumed consent or the soft opt-out was made strongly by Mr Wells. We need that radical rethink so that we can up the numbers of organ donors. We also need to do all the things that Mr Ross and Mr Dunne talked

about, such as looking at the number of transplant co-ordinators and examining where the system works well and where it falls down. A proactive review by the Department will be useful.

Mr Ross: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCallister: I was coming on to your other remarks.

Mr Ross: I thank the Member for giving way, and I am sure that he will come to my other comments later. Does the Member agree with me that, irrespective of your view of opt-out or opt-in systems, the first stage should be making sure that the current voluntary system is efficient and effective? Does he further agree that, if that fails, we can then have a conversation about taking the dramatic step of moving to an opt-out system? The first step should be to make sure that the current system is efficient.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McCallister: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I do not think that anyone is overly precious about how we how do it, as long as the system works and we up the number of donors. Mrs Dobson said that 90% of those surveyed in the UK believe in organ donation, yet only 30% of us are on the register. That is a huge gap that needs to be filled, and we need to look at how we can do that.

I do not accept Mr Ross's point that an opt-out system would somehow be evidence of the great state coming in. At the risk of showing unionist unity, I share some of his civil libertarian views; however, I do not see the state coming in and somehow taking charge of people's organs. It is not as though the state is saying, "Thank you very much, we will have a couple of kidneys from you and something else from you". That is not what would happen. Mr Wells's liver might be in better shape than that of some other Members, but that is a very different debate. I do not agree with Mr Ross's point, and I do not see that the state would be overstretching itself if we were to move to a soft opt-out system. The rights of every citizen should be respected.

Ms S Ramsey: I said earlier that education is key, and other Members mentioned that. Years ago, there was a rumour that, if people carried an organ donor card, it was less likely that additional steps would be taken to save them if they were involved in a serious accident. That is why education is key.

Mr McCallister: I hope that it was just a rumour and that people would do all that they could to save someone's life. It goes back to the point about respecting the individual's wishes to donate or not.

We need to make it easier for people to get on to the organ donor register, and we have tried to do that by including organ donation consents on driving licences. It is one of the things that people tend to put off like making a will or doing that DIY job around the house. It goes on for months and years until the wife gives you such a hard time about it.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr McCallister: We need to make it easy. I support the Minister's review. I also support the motion, the amendment, which was well worded, and the taking of all steps, including looking seriously at a soft opt-out.

Mr P Ramsey: I welcome the opportunity to participate in such a hugely important debate. One could only be impressed by the personal witness given by Jo-Anne Dobson about her son Mark.

Unfortunately, 1,000 people died last year on the National Health Service waiting list for organs. A further 1,000 people risked their life to donate a kidney. They were so desperate watching their loved one die slowly that they chose to take the risk of major surgery themselves. When dramatic and tragic statistics such as those demand that more can be done, more should be done.

The SDLP acknowledges that, since 2000, because of the hard work of healthcare professionals, there has been a consistent rise in the number of people registering to become a donor. There has been a subsequent continuous rise in organ donations. We also want to pay tribute to the families of those who have donated their organs. Jim Wells gave a prime example of a young man who, having lost his life, contributed to so many other people's lives. I have spoken to many people in my constituency whose lives have been saved and whose quality of life has been improved dramatically, and they are deeply grateful to the donors for that.

The organ donation task force set a target of a 50% increase in donation rates between 2008 and 2013, as Alastair Ross mentioned. He acknowledged the very good work being carried out by the Minister, the Department, the Public Health Agency, the health trusts and organ transplant teams in striving to meet those targets in recent years. A recent BMA report raised two key issues about the 50% target. The first is that current measures are not on track to bring about that 50% improvement, and, secondly, even when the 50% improvement is achieved, people will still die unnecessarily. It is obvious that more needs to be done to save lives.

BMA studies showed that, when asked — we know that the facts are clear — 90% of people said that they would be willing to donate their organs in the event of death but only one third of those people have got round to registering for that purpose. That leaves families in a difficult situation when asked about organ donation, because they do not necessarily know what their relative wanted to do. We also know that 40% of families who are asked to donate their loved one's organs say no. That means that 30% of potential donors never get the chance to donate.

Mr Wells: The Member has hit upon one of the most crucial issues. Yes, 40% say no, but, in other jurisdictions in Europe, when specially trained staff have been employed who have a way with dealing with people going through that trauma and can explain donation to them, it increases dramatically. I agree with Alastair Ross: our first step must be to make certain that the best possible person is dealing with those families and can explain the situation to them. That may not be a consultant; it may be someone totally different with bereavement training. That is what we need to tackle immediately to increase donor numbers.

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

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Member for his intervention. The SDLP amendment asks the Minister to give consideration to improving the current donation rates, including an opt-out system of donation. Members talked about the system that is under consideration in Wales and the Spanish model. We

acknowledge that the BMA now supports an opt-out system as a means of maximising donation rates. Nevertheless, I take the point, made by Kieran McCarthy in particular, that we need to ensure that all ethical issues are addressed. It is clear that precautions must be taken and there must be no room for error.

As a number of Members said, Spain has the highest rate of donation in Europe. Incidentally, it used to have the lowest rate, so it has obviously done something right. There are several reasons for that, one of them being the introduction of an opt-out system, which has created a subtle and positive shift in attitude towards organ donation in that region. Donation becomes the usual rather than the unusual option for people, and it eases the burden on families and medical staff when discussing organ donation. Anyone with a strong objection to being a donor will be able to opt out, and their reservations and intentions will be clearly known. In our current system, 90% of the population —

Mr Brady: I want to raise a point that has probably not been addressed. It is a logistical point, in a way, and is something that the Minister might take on board. I am not sure how to deal with it. The donation of organs would, presumably, delay a wake and a funeral, which may be a factor. It is something that people may not have thought about, but it has been raised before. I just wanted to make that point.

3.45 pm

Mr P Ramsey: Mickey Brady makes a fine point. In Ireland, we have a tradition of a wake. It is very important to families, who want to see the body at home. If the body is not at home, it is not a wake. The point is very valid.

The SDLP supports a proactive approach involving the medical profession, patients and the general public. That is how Spain transformed its donation issues. It is vital that we have investment in health service infrastructure, such as an increase in the number of ICU beds, and, as a number of Members mentioned, it is vital that we continue to train and provide specialist teams of donation advisers in main hospitals.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr P Ramsey: I appeal to the Minister to come forward with creative and imaginative ideas to increase donation rates. I support the motion and the amendment.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): First, I thank Jim Wells, Pam Lewis, Gordon Dunne and Paula Bradley for bringing the issue to the House. Jim Wells, at the outset, articulated very well why we need to do more. He set a very useful tone and context for the debate. It has been a very interesting and useful debate. We have heard diverging opinions within parties and the same opinion across parties. It has been a very open debate in which people have given their thoughts and views, and that is a good thing.

I come to the debate with some experience of the issues. Having lost my mother, who was in intensive care at the time of her death, I have some understanding of what families go through at that time. I know the trauma, challenge and disruption that may be involved in seeking to get permission from families for the removal of organs, when all that is in their mind is the loss of a loved one for whom they cared so much. At the same time, my mother had huge problems with

her liver all her life. Would a liver transplant at an earlier point in her life have saved it? I do not know.

I also recall very well news coming through to our household about my father's brother losing his kidneys. A number of years later, news came through to the home that they had found a suitable transplant. He received a transplant in the late 1970s and is still living to this day. I have to pay tribute to Dr Douglas and Professor McGeown, who were leaders in the field in the Belfast City Hospital. Many people are alive today as a result of their magnificent work.

I want to refer to another friend of mine, the sister of my best man. As a young student, she went off to a Third World country and picked up something. It did not seem to be that big an issue, but it did huge damage to her liver over time. She received a liver transplant, but she was too low when she got it. She had deteriorated too much when she received it and, as a consequence, passed away around four months later. Her husband believes very strongly that, had she received a liver transplant at an earlier point in her life, she would still be alive. All those experiences guide me on this issue.

We have heard the argument about not taking something that does not belong to you. I believe that that is right. It is inappropriate to assume that you have consent to remove organs from someone's body. At the same time, I am very clear that, if something happens to me, I want to give others the opportunity to live, as opposed to my organs being donated to the worms.

Organ donation is vital. Jo-Anne Dobson brought her personal experience to the debate, and it is good to see her son with us today. Few of us will have failed to notice the amount of press that the issue has received in recent times and the harrowing stories of those desperately in need of organs. I visited Libby Nash, who writes in the 'Belfast Telegraph' on a weekly basis. That young lady's hopes that an organ is coming have been raised, I think, four or five times. She was set to fly over to England, and then the whole thing was dashed. It is certainly hugely challenging if you live every day with the hope "Could it be today?". Therefore, I am clearly of the opinion that we need to do more in respect of retrieving and transplanting organs for those who need them.

I should say that we have a relatively good story to tell in Northern Ireland. However, the programme here needs to be as successful as others throughout the United Kingdom, and that has perhaps been the case in more recent years. Although the number of Northern Ireland organ donors is on the increase, I would like to see it increasing further. In Northern Ireland, for example, kidneys are the only solid organs transplanted. Patients requiring other organs are, therefore, referred to the appropriate centres in the UK or sometimes in the Republic of Ireland.

The live donor programme is something that we can be very proud of. In the UK, there is a very small, highly specialised programme of live liver transplants that is primarily for children. It is recognised that deceased donors are preferred. However, there are only around 20 of them in the UK. There was a live lung transplant programme, but that was discontinued due to the risk to the donors. In Northern Ireland and across the UK, we have live donor programmes for kidneys. The live donor programme has been a real

success story in Northern Ireland, and that is largely down to the efforts of nurse Haslett. That very successful programme has seen the number of living donors rise from 10 in 2008-09 to 51 in 2010-11.

I heard how Mr Ramsey described the live donor programme, and I beg to differ on this occasion. Live donor transplantation is remarkably more successful than deceased donor transplantation. Therefore, I think that the opportunity to give a friend or relative the gift of life is a very worthy consideration. The percentage of kidneys still working after five years is 84% for live donor transplants, as opposed to 66% for deceased donor transplants. The percentage of kidneys still working after 10 years is 77% for live donor transplants, as against 58% for deceased donor transplants. In respect of patient survival, 83% of those who receive live donor transplants are still living after 10 years, whereas only 61% of those who receive deceased donor transplants are. So, live donor transplants are a huge success story, and we should be very proud of the work going on at Belfast City Hospital to achieve that. There is a three in 10,000 risk to donors, and the risks are largely due to bleeding, infection, blood clots and so forth. So, we want to encourage the number of live donor transplantations to continue to grow.

It has been the case in Northern Ireland that some kidneys from deceased donors have been refused. Some 184 kidneys were offered to patients in Northern Ireland, but, for a variety of reasons, we were not able to receive them. That may sound like an alarming figure. There are quite a lot of good reasons why that should not have happened. Around 100 kidneys were refused for donor reasons, such as age, high-risk behaviour, history of cancer etc, and the surgeons looking after the transplants, therefore, did not believe that they were suitable. We were not able to receive another 10 kidneys either because the recipient just was not ready for the surgery at the time or because there was the prospect of a live donor. Another 47 kidneys were refused for organ-related reasons such as damage, poor perfusion or unusual or difficult anatomy. Around another 20 organs were refused because we did not have the operating space or the surgeons at the time. I feel very sad about the fact that 20 people who could have had a kidney transplant in Northern Ireland in the past two years did not. To address those logistical difficulties, we are seeking to recruit two additional surgeons. That will hopefully ensure that we refuse fewer kidneys because we do not have the logistical base to carry out transplants.

Mr Durkan mentioned North/South co-operation. We are part of a UK-wide system that is overseen by NHS Blood and Transplant. It enables our patients to benefit from organs donated in the rest of the UK and vice versa, which gives us a very large pool. That is a good thing. Patients in Northern Ireland have the opportunity to join the ROI transplant register, but they cannot be on both registers at the same time. In addition, ROI retrieval teams may be available when one is not available in the UK, and a protocol is in place for us to use that resource. There have been only two occasions when the UK retrieval teams have not been available, and that was due to severe weather conditions.

In 2006, the organ donation task force report made 14 recommendations and indicated that we needed to increase organ donation by 50% by 2013. The current national increase is 31%, so the increase of 50% is progressive. We in Northern Ireland are considerably ahead of that. In

Northern Ireland, work on the ODTF recommendations was taken forward by the local implementation group, which was chaired by the Public Health Agency and made up of commissioners, clinicians, NHSBT, voluntary organisations and the DHSSPS. Immense improvements have been made in recent years, and each trust now has in place a clinical lead for organ donation and there is a team of 14 specialist nurses in organ donation. In addition, a regional clinical lead has recently been appointed.

We recognise, in each instance where organs are donated, that that has been a tragedy for some family. We welcome the fact that, although there were only 21 donors in 2008-09, there were 40 donors in 2010-11. The increase being sought in the report has been met and exceeded in Northern Ireland. We need to get the rest of the United Kingdom to that position so that that large pool of organs that I referred to might be available to us.

I applaud those who have been involved in that very effective work to date, and we could do more about donations from people who die from circulatory problems rather than from those who die as the result of some major trauma or accident. Although the ODTF reports have a further year to run before the target for increasing donations to 50%, the programme delivery board recently published its final report, which showed that the recommendations have been embedded into the normal business of the health service. Work is ongoing towards reaching the target.

Much has been made of what has happened elsewhere on the issue of opting in and opting out. In Spain, the opt-out model has not come about recently. It was introduced in 1979, and Spain has the highest donation rate in Europe. However, the evidence is clear that it is not purely due to the opt-out legislation. It was only after 1989, when Spain introduced a comprehensive, nationally organised donation system, that donor rates increased. The increase in donations could be attributed to the increase in public awareness and, indeed, the available funding. Therefore, it is important that we consider all the options to build on the vast improvements that have already taken place in Northern Ireland. We need to recognise the improvements that have been achieved, and, in looking to how we proceed in the future, we need to take full cognisance of that. Wales has proposed an opt-out system and has just completed a public consultation on that.

Although we recognise that we need to go further to all the advances that we have made in organ donation in recent times, we need to have an open debate. I trust that this is one of the early points in the debate on whether an opt-out in Northern Ireland should be considered. It needs to be considered in the context of what has been achieved and what can be achieved without legislation. That includes having greater public awareness and having the appropriate professional teams in our hospitals to advise people in a compassionate and caring way about how they might best be able to help others to have life and how that can be a reflection on the person that they have just lost.

4.00 pm

So, given that this is a truly sensitive issue, I think that we need to manage people's expectations in a way that means that, for people who are desirous, should something unforeseen happen, their relatives can give life to others

after that tragedy in their life. We need to make every effort to ensure that we maximise the numbers that are doing that, and it will be a course of work for us to continue to discuss how we can achieve that in the coming months.

Mr McDevitt: I thank colleagues from across the House for their contributions to the debate this evening. As Jo-Anne Dobson illustrates, when an issue such as this touches a family, it does so in a very real and serious way, and I commend Jo-Anne for using the platform that her seat here affords her to keep the issue on everyone's agenda. As the Minister points out, it has touched us all. I am sure that I am not the only one in this House who has had to confront the reality of making an informed choice in a less than clear situation. I have done so not once but twice in recent years in the case of my own parents in the Republic.

This is a sensitive debate, but it is an exceptionally important one. To Alastair Ross's credit, he has raised the basic issue at the heart of the debate, which is ultimately about competing rights and responsibilities and about the extent to which the state can and should have an involvement in the collective well-being of everyone in it. It is a debate about whether we consent to being part of a jurisdiction conditionally or whether we consent to being part of a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. It is also a debate about whether we are willing to entrust the state with certain powers allowing it to act in the best interests of society, as we do in so many other aspects of our life. That is not an easy thing to do. I listened attentively to a 15-minute contribution from the Minister, and I know one thing for sure: he has not come to a view on the matter, or, if there is a view, he is certainly reluctant to share it with the House.

As many colleagues will know, because I bore you about it a lot, I had the great benefit of moving to Spain as a young boy just after the 1978 constitution was introduced. The law that the Minister referred to is one of the first laws introduced by the new free democratic Spain under a socialist government. That law is very much founded on those principles of citizenship and is rooted in a French model of the state. It allows the state to take certain responsibilities and secures the consent of the people to operate it. Of course, no law is a solution in itself; it needs systems. The Minister is absolutely right: it took a generation to realise that, unless you put some systems behind a duty or responsibility, you do not really see change.

The one thing that seems very evident from today's debate — this is the harsh fact that we need to reflect on — is that, in the vast majority of states where there are successful high transplant rates, the foundation is a law of presumed consent. It appears to me that there are not a huge number of states that are achieving very high transplant rates where there is not a foundation of presumed consent. The question then becomes twofold, and the first is about the law. I respect deeply Mr Ross's libertarian views. Indeed, our lives have suffered on at least one occasion for the sake of debating those views in private, but we have to accept that taking a decision about a statute is only the first decision that we will probably need to take. The second and real challenge becomes whether the state wishes to operationalise that statute and put the resources behind it and the systems in place that will ensure that those duties are exercised in a fair and equitable way. That is a way of absolute informed consent, even if it is presumed, and it is a way that seeks to give the maximum amount of protection

to such a critical decision. It would be an awful tragedy if we did not move on from that today and begin to explore the ethical and legal issues around a concept such as presumed consent, rather than get hung up on the debate about whether or not it is a good foundation. Wales has succeeded in doing that, and we have an opportunity to do the same. I think that it would be a lovely testament —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr McDevitt: — to the House in its new form if it is able to take an issue such as this and debate it in an informed way.

Ms P Bradley: The motion calls on the Health Minister to undertake a review of organ donation in Northern Ireland. The Assembly is not dealing with this issue in isolation. As Members said, in Wales, a White Paper examining how donors give organ donation consent has just ended its consultation phase.

I thank Members for what Mr Dunne called a mature and sensitive debate. I pay special thanks to Mrs Dobson for sharing with us the story of her son Mark. It is often forgotten that we have lives that go on outside the Chamber. I know that I speak for everyone when I say that I hope that Mark has a very full life ahead of him.

Mrs Dobson also said that organ donation has been called the gift of life. That was evidenced in the 2011 British Transplant Games, which highlighted how the gift of an organ can transform a life. For a registered donor, it is inexpensive, but for a recipient, it is the one thing that no amount of money can buy. It can also bring amazing comfort to a donor's family. In Northern Ireland at the start of this month, 226 people were waiting for some form of transplant. In 2011, sadly, nine people in Northern Ireland died as a result of a scarcity of donors.

The organ donation task force contends that it should be possible to increase post-death organ donation for the entire United Kingdom by 50%. Just think what a difference that would make if one of our loved ones was waiting for an organ. It is important to remember that organ donation is not simply a local issue; organs donated in Northern Ireland can be sent to other regions of the United Kingdom and vice versa. The issues that need to be addressed to ensure that the process works to its best capacity have already been reviewed in the organ donation task force's report.

There are, however, some startling statistics relating to Northern Ireland that increase the need for a review of organ donation. As Jim Wells said, the positive statistics show that 77 people received kidney donations in 2010-11, while a further 30 people from Northern Ireland received transplants from other centres in Britain. That total of 107 is up on the previous year's figure of 77 transplants.

As Members said, the shortage of deceased donors needs to be urgently reviewed, as 51 of those kidney donations were from live donors. The lack of deceased donors means that people are risking a major procedure to help a loved one. For kidney transplants, the risk of death to a donor is one in 3,000; with live liver donors, that risk increases to one in 100. What a decision for any family to have to make.

As Mr McCallister said, we have a responsibility to have those conversations with our families and loved ones, and we call for an increase on the register. He also mentioned

that many of us say that we will get around to putting our names on the register. It is like making a will or doing something around the house. Many of us feel that we want to be donors, but I, sadly, am like many others and have not registered. We need to push for more people to register. We must have a review to address how we can ensure that more deceased donors who can donate do donate. The review needs to be pursued sensitively and with care to ensure that no one feels unduly pressured to donate their loved one's organs.

The number of potential donors identified in Northern Ireland last year through brainstem tests was 68; of those, 64 families were approached for consent to the organs being used. The number of potential donors identified after circulatory death was 54, yet only 15 families were approached and asked to donate. That is just over one quarter of potential donor families being asked to donate. That highlights that something is not working in the system to maximise the number of donors. In an ideal world, all potential donors should be approached and given the option of donation.

We as an Assembly should work towards ensuring that we can perhaps first follow the Welsh example of changing our current opt-in system to one of the two opt-out systems in place in 22 other countries.

Mr Ross raised various issues around the opt-out system, and that is a good example of why this review needs to take place. A sound evidence base needs to be sought in order for us to make a full and informed decision through an informed debate, as the Minister said.

Secondly, we can promote the transplantation of organs in a positive light. Mr Durkan commented on the various media campaigns that have run successfully over the years and should continue to do so. Finally, we can see what we can do to expand the ways that people can access the organ donation register to sign it while the review takes place. There are a number of ways that a person can register. As Mr Dunne said, this needs to be a little more innovative, and one of the most innovative that I have come across is through the Boots advantage reward card. When you sign up for that card, you can register to be an organ donor at the same time. That may be something that other large organisations need to look at.

Organ donation is a gift that is cherished, not just by the individual who receives but by their family and the donor's family. We as an Assembly need to ensure that we are working to maximise the opportunity to give and receive this gift. As Mr Durkan said in his opening statement, we have a moral responsibility and are duty-bound. I therefore support the motion's call for a review of organ donation as well as the amendment.

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

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to undertake a review of organ donation which should consider all options for increasing organ donations and carrying out a clinical ethics consultation on the introduction of an opt-out scheme.

Motion made:

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

Adjournment

Home Help Services: County Fermanagh

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that the proposer of the topic shall have 15 minutes. The Minister will have 10 minutes in which to respond. All other Members who wish to speak on this occasion will have up to 10 minutes.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I missed how long I have to speak, but however long it was, I doubt that I will need it. I thank the Minister for coming. I know that he has a very busy schedule and that he has just finished an important debate on organ donation, so I am glad that he is here to listen.

The gaps in home healthcare provision in Fermanagh are a massive issue. The problem has been going on for many years, and, to be honest, I am heartbroken dealing with tales from distraught citizens who cannot access the most basic level of health and social care services, particularly in the most rural areas of Fermanagh.

There are clear gaps when one looks at where home help care is available and where there are problems. One of the main reasons behind that is the terms and conditions for those employed in the profession. Those employed as carers are passionate people; they are dedicated to what they do and are committed to those for whom they care. However, the poor rate of pay and the low or often non-existent rates of mileage payments make it very difficult for people to become a carer, particularly in rural areas where they have to cover a considerable number of bad roads to get to see someone who needs help. Those gaps in home help provision are seriously impacting on people and putting the quality of their lives at risk, particularly those who live in rural areas and who are very vulnerable and in their later years. We now have a situation in which the health budget is being cut significantly, in real terms, and that is putting massive stress on the health and social care budget.

4.15 pm

I can quote one example of a lady in Garrison who had a fall recently and became paralysed. As a result, she needed 24-hour care and had to spend nine months in hospital. She would have much preferred to spend that time at home, and the medical practitioners in the hospital were happy to release her to be cared for in the community so that she could live at home with her husband. However, unfortunately, there was a complete lack of home help provision in Garrison at that time. Therefore, that poor lady had to spend nine months in hospital unnecessarily. It impacted not only on her quality of life but on the healthcare budget, because she had to stay in hospital at huge cost and for an unacceptable reason.

If the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) were to take an innovative look at the issue and provide proper home help provision in many rural areas, it would save itself huge sums of money. The problem

is probably not confined to Fermanagh, but I am well aware of it in that area. However, the Minister and his officials will be in a better position to speak about it.

I introduced this adjournment debate to make sure that the Health Minister is aware of the issue. There are issues in Fermanagh, and probably in the wider Western Trust area, as a result of the recent tender award and subsequent legal challenge that is going on there. Due to that legal challenge, we are quite constrained in what we can talk about. However, there are issues with the Western Trust and its level of communication with agencies and with the independent and voluntary sector that provide home help services on its behalf.

People at the front line of delivering home help have voiced repeated concerns that the trust is creaming off the easiest or least problematic patients, who live in easier to access areas, and that it is leaving the more difficult, less profitable patients to the agencies and the community and voluntary sector. The result is that it is much more difficult for people who are doing the job voluntarily to continue doing it, and it is leaving those who are often in the most vulnerable position isolated.

I think I have outlined my concerns well enough at this stage. I am really here to listen to what the Minister has to say, to see whether he is aware of the issue, and whether he will take urgent action to address it as soon as possible, because these are people's lives that we are dealing with. I feel that the issue can be addressed quite simply, and I know that there is ongoing rationalisation of home help provision contracts in the Western Trust. Therefore, I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say. I thank him once again for coming here this evening. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Elliott: I thank Mr Flanagan for bringing this adjournment debate here today. I start by recording my thanks and appreciation to all home helps and staff who work in the community and deliver services to the wider public. Last year, during the really heavy snow and frost, those people went out every day for very little compensation or financial support and drove along the back roads, byroads, high roads, low roads and streets of Fermanagh and beyond to deliver home help care and support to the most vulnerable people in our society. It is only right that we record our appreciation to all those carers and support workers.

It is interesting to note that in the Western Trust area, which covers Fermanagh, the number of people who are being supported by the statutory sector and receive domiciliary care has fallen from 2,861 in 2008 to 2,328 in 2010, but the figures for people who receive care from independent providers appear to be reasonably stable. That other figure highlights a reduction of almost 20% in the number of people receiving that level of care from the statutory sector. I assume that Minister Poots will clarify or correct this, but my calculation is that 10%, or thereabouts, of the total health budget in Northern Ireland is spent on social care.

We need to move away from a discussion solely about domiciliary care to a much wider discussion about how we treat, respect and deal with what is an ageing population in Northern Ireland. The proportion of older people in Northern Ireland living in nursing homes is three and a half times higher than that in England and Wales. I wonder whether proper assessments are being carried out to establish

whether those people are better suited to being at home or somewhere else, which would cost the Health Department less and, indeed, wider society.

The recent Compton review makes specific allusion to the fact that charging for domiciliary care will soon be considered. That is a significantly controversial issue and something that I believe would resonate widely with the public and bring forward a wider public debate. I know that the system that they are using in Fermanagh and, I am sure, other areas, is changing. I am sure Mr Flanagan will recognise that from his constituency workload that comes in. Many people who needed domiciliary care had one person go in to them, and they got used to that person. Now, by and large, they are changing to a rota system. Obviously, people will not have the level of consistency with a rota system that they had in the number of previous years. It is something that older people in particular will find very difficult to get used to. As the change takes place, grows and gets more frequent in use, it will, probably, be easier for those people to come to terms with the system, especially if they have never been used to one person being with them consistently. I recognise that difficulty that exists at the moment.

Mr Flanagan referred to the legal proceedings around the contract for domiciliary care for independent providers. I am led to believe that a date has been set for that legal case; it is sometime in May. Obviously, we await the outcome of that.

We had the privilege of having a very good domiciliary package for my late father. It is only when you experience it at first hand that you realise the real need for such a provision in the community and how much those people do, sometimes for fairly little reward. As we live in an ageing society, it is something that we must come to terms with.

As I said earlier, we must look at the bigger picture. How do we deal with an ageing population in Northern Ireland? We must look at the domiciliary care issues, bed-blocking in hospitals and care providers in nursing homes and residential care. We must also look at the difference between nursing homes in the statutory sector and those in the independent sector and consider whether one of those sectors offers cost savings or better care provision.

I welcome the discussion and the debate, although I think it is only a start to the much wider debate that needs to be had on the ageing population.

Mr Byrne: I support the topic for debate that has been proposed by Mr Flanagan. It is very appropriate. I support it primarily because a relative of my wife died in Fermanagh last October, and I saw at first hand the level of care that home helps can provide. The home help service has been cut and decimated too much. Very often, it has been one of the Cinderella parts of the social care system. I feel that home help services always get cut first when social care and community care package cuts are brought in. There are many families that greatly depend on home help, but if the carer who comes into a house has only 15 or 20 minutes allocated, it is virtually impossible for that carer to provide the level of care that they want to.

In large towns, agencies can provide a bank of care workers, and very often they manage the system quite well. However, out in scattered rural areas, people depend on individual members of the community who provide a home-help service. I know a lady who looks after five different people in

the Glenelly valley. She told me that trying to look after five people every morning and afternoon is a nightmare. Were she not so generous with her own time, she would not be able to cope. She gives more than the 20 minutes allocated to each person. The carer, and her interest for the patient, is being exploited. That is something that the Minister and the Department should examine.

In some cases, families realise that the home-help service is not adequate. Very often a social worker will come and assess the case and has to recommend that the person is put into residential care. That is largely because the home-help service that the family gets is not for long enough, or is not sufficiently sustainable, so that the family and the social worker must decide that the person has to go into residential care. That is often a missed opportunity, and it leads to greater costs. If there were a more adequate home-help service, it would not be an issue.

I support the debate and I thank the Minister for being here.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I also support the debate brought by my colleague Phil Flanagan. I am sorry for arriving late; I was at another event. I did not catch all the debate, but I will echo much of what Joe has said. I will point out a number of key issues. Since I received notice of this debate, I have been speaking to a number of carers and other people. Thank God, none of my family has yet had to receive care.

I know the person whom Joe Byrne was talking about; she comes from the town of Lisnaskea. The problem is the time limits. Carers will tell you that they are barely out of the car and sometimes, though the client is barely out of bed, they have to move on to the next client. It is impossible to get someone out of bed and dressed in that time, particularly if that person has dementia or Alzheimer's disease. I do not mean to be disparaging, but the client can be awkward and the carer may have to move on to the next client without having even made the person a cup of tea. Those underlying problems often mean that those people are disadvantaged. A carer told me of a case where she went in and her client was sick but, because there was insufficient time, the carer had to move on to the next client and there was not time to call a doctor. The sick client had to wait another four hours until their next carer visit.

There is another issue, which may have been mentioned before I came into the Chamber. A lot of the carers get no travel expenses. Those people work for the minimum wage; they have to pay tax out of that; and, if they have to pay travel, it is very difficult to get anyone to drive any sort of distance. That is particularly a problem in Fermanagh, it being a very rural constituency. It is not worth their while.

Joe is right. Sometimes, carers go beyond the call of duty and give that bit of extra time — more than is required of them — because they have a relationship with the person for whom they are caring.

Those are two key issues for the Minister. We are talking about a cornerstone of the health system. Those people, in their late years, are some of the most vulnerable in society. We should protect them, and put in place the means for them to have the best quality of life.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I thank the Member for securing the debate.

One of my key priorities is to ensure that, wherever possible, people are helped to maintain their independence at home. That is vital, and everyone should have a choice about the care they need and how that need will be met.

The message that we have been receiving loud and clear in the Department is that people want to continue living independent lives in their own homes for as long as it is practical to do so.

4.30 pm

Looking to the future, our population of over-65s is set to more than double in the next 50 years. In 2008, we had 248,500 people aged 65 years and over. That represents 14% of the population, and it will increase to 24% by 2041. A man reaching 65 today can expect to live another 17 years, while a 65-year-old woman can expect to live another 20 years. I see that Mr Wells is with us; vegetarians can anticipate a further seven years. That is according to Mr Wells, I might add.

To ensure that we have the resources to care for those older people who may need social care, we must modernise the services that we can offer them. In order to achieve that, I have firmly committed to continuing to transform the way that the services are delivered in our communities to ensure access to high-quality services that are close to home. 'Transforming Your Care' illustrates the range of issues that we need to face.

I have committed to taking forward a fundamental review of the direction and funding of adult social care in Northern Ireland, starting over the next few months with the publication of a discussion document that sets out the issues that we need to debate so that we can take all this into account.

A key element of the way that our social care has developed in recent years has been the expansion of flexible and responsive domiciliary care services. Domiciliary care has incorporated the former home help scheme, and it provides help with a range of services, such as personal hygiene, continence management, problems of immobility, food and diet, including assistance with eating, and simple treatments, including assistance with dressing and getting in and out of bed.

Through our mixed economy of care, which is a partnership between the statutory sector and the independent and voluntary sectors, we are helping more people than ever to stay at home and to avoid admission to hospital or residential care. Over 23,000 people in Northern Ireland, including over 4,500 in the Western Trust area, are in receipt of domiciliary care packages at a cost of £155 million.

In Fermanagh specifically, the trust provides social care in partnership with several independent and voluntary organisations. In 2010-11, the Western Trust delivered on average 21,240 care hours each week through 17 service providers at a cost of £11.52 million. The Western Trust provides about 40% of domiciliary care services, with the independent sector providing the remaining 60%.

An analysis of recent home care referral activity demonstrated that, over a two-month period, the Western Trust facilitated 661 referrals trust wide for new home care cases or increases to existing cases. Of those, 182 — or 27.5% — were in Fermanagh. That figure is higher than in

the other three localities, clearly demonstrating that home care is routinely accommodated in Fermanagh.

It is estimated that 550 domiciliary care workers are employed across Fermanagh. That compares favourably with the trust's other three localities. In 2011, the Western Trust delivered home care services worth £18.9 million. Approximately 24% of that, which is around £4.6 million, was spent in Fermanagh. Based on the local population figures, the per capita expenditure on home care in Fermanagh is currently higher than it is in the other trust localities.

The projected increase in the number of older people has been well documented. Unfortunately, however, the resources that are available to us will not increase accordingly. So, with that in mind, as well as the need to reform and modernise the services on offer for older people, the Western Trust last year tendered for independent home care provision.

A key objective of that tender process was the opportunity to reform the home care service delivery model and commissioning arrangements to generate efficiencies, thereby increasing access to home care services across the trust area. However, a subsequent legal challenge has meant that the trust has been unable to progress that key reform. It is hoped that that matter will be resolved soon, enabling delivery of the benefits that the trust expects to be delivered. The trust assured me that that tendering process is not an attempt to bring about a reduction in domiciliary care services in County Fermanagh. Rather, it is to improve commissioning arrangements and produce a more effective model of service delivery for a greater number of people.

Although the primary care responsibility must be to those at greatest risk, I recognise that preventative, low-level support can avoid deterioration in an individual's situation. I therefore expect the health and social care service to develop methods of risk assessment to help it to identify those where risks to independence appear relatively low but are likely to become more serious over time. I am keenly aware that we must strike a delicate balance between the necessity to respond to urgent and intensive needs and, at the same time, ensure that people with lesser needs do not unnecessarily slide into dependency for the want of early intervention.

Domiciliary care, with all its component parts, plays a vital role in maintaining independent living. However, other services are actively involved, such as intermediate care, which is designed to bridge the gap between hospital care and health and social care in the community; rehabilitation and re-enablement services; community meals; remote tele-monitoring and assistive technology; and many services provided by the community nursing and primary care teams, to name but a few. I also pay tribute to the tireless work of the many thousands of unpaid carers who help to support loved ones in their homes. I do not take such support for granted and do not believe that it should go unrecognised.

Above all, it is crucial to take into account the perceptions and wishes of the individuals themselves and their carers about how they wish to have their care delivered, by whom and in which setting. As we look to the future, I expect to see a real move towards a greater personalisation of people's care packages, reflecting their own and their carers' wishes as well as needs. Direct payments represents a start in that direction but, currently, as a scheme, does not

go far enough in its ambitions and is not attractive enough to service users. Clients need to be helped to work with trusts to create and manage tailored packages of care that suit their circumstances and preferences. Fitting the client or patient into the nearest available service is not good enough. People expect more say, more control and more choice in how their needs are met. That is what they told the 'Transforming Your Care' team and what they are telling us every day.

Clearly, tough decisions will have to be made to ensure that we are able to meet the needs of the very vulnerable in our community and the challenging financial commitments in this difficult economic climate. However, I am firmly committed to continuing to transform the way that services are delivered in our communities to ensure access to high-quality services close to home, whether in County Fermanagh or any other part of Northern Ireland, so that people's needs are met in as flexible and responsive a way as possible.

Adjourned at 4.38 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 27 February 2012

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Resignation of Margaret Ritchie

Mr Speaker: Before we begin today's business, I advise the House that I have received a letter from Ms Margaret Ritchie giving me notice that she intends to resign as a Member of the Assembly with effect from 31 March 2012. I have notified the Chief Electoral Officer in accordance with section 35 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Matter of the Day

Oscars: 'The Shore'

Mr Speaker: Mr Robin Swann has sought leave to make a statement on the Oscar success of the film 'The Shore', which fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. I will call Mr Swann to speak for up to three minutes on the subject. I will then call Members from the other parties as agreed with the Whips. Those Members will also have up to three minutes to speak. As Members will know by now, there will be no opportunity for interventions, questions or a vote on the matter. I will not take any points of order until this item of business has been dealt with. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Mr Swann: I am delighted to bring this matter of the day to the House on behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party. 'The Shore' is a film directed by Belfast man Terry George and filmed near the director's family home in Coney Island. It stars major Northern Ireland actors such as Ciarán Hinds, Maggie Cronin and Conleth Hill and depicts Northern Ireland in a hugely positive light. Therefore, it is without doubt a Northern Ireland film in every sense.

Last night, 'The Shore' was awarded an Oscar in the short film live action category. That is a fantastic achievement, given the prominence of an Oscar as the highest accolade possible in the film industry. Although we have had a number of Oscar nominees from Northern Ireland in the past, including Liam Neeson, Kenneth Branagh and Seamus McGarvey, to win in that category this year is outstanding.

However, what did this Assembly do to make the best of that success? What plans did the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure put in place to market such a significant occasion as the winning of this award? Where was Invest NI, for example?

The same could be said for Rory McIlroy, who performed so well last night and finished runner-up in the WGC Match Play in Arizona. We must capitalise on successes of that nature. However, it seems that we are missing opportunities. The creative industries, in particular, must be adequately supported, given that this is the largest of a number of successes in the area and follows on from the hugely popular 'Games of Thrones'.

In conclusion, I pass on my congratulations to the director, Terry George, and to all the cast and crew of 'The Shore' on their magnificent achievement.

Miss M McIlveen: I echo the positive sentiments of the Member who spoke previously. Over recent years, the film-making industry in Northern Ireland has grown dramatically, and that has been helped in no small part not only by the funding given to Northern Ireland Screen but by the ability of Northern Ireland to attract film-makers to our shores through the work of the Northern Ireland Executive. With major television shows such as 'Games of Thrones' and movies such as 'Your Highness' and 'Killing Bono', we are developing the technical skills to go with the artistic talent of directors such as Terry George.

Terry George is already a well-known and respected screenwriter and director. He has previously been nominated for two Oscars, so it really was third time lucky in this case. No doubt many in the Chamber took the opportunity last night to watch 'The Shore' on BBC Television ahead of its Oscar triumph. The film centres on characters played by the immensely talented Ciarán Hinds and Conleth Hill. 'The Shore' was funded by Northern Ireland Screen and was filmed entirely on location in Northern Ireland. As Sammy Wilson would say, it was "Made in Ulster". This is a proud day for all of us in Northern Ireland, and I hope that, with the continued support of the Assembly through funding for film-making here and the positive promotion of Northern Ireland throughout the world, we will have many more days like this.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I add my congratulations to those of the Members who spoke previously, and I thank Mr Swann for raising this matter. This is very much a historic occasion in that it is third time lucky for Mr George. I also congratulate his daughter, who was instrumental in this as well.

My memories of Conleth Hill go back a long time. In fact, I remember him playing in St Canice Hall some 30-odd years ago. Until this morning, I thought that St Canice Hall in Dungiven was the last independent cinema in the North, but I hear that there is one in Comber as well. I worked in that cinema, so I have a great grá for the motion picture industry.

Some years ago, I was also fortunate enough to be one of the first trainees with the Irish Language Broadcast Fund. From that fund, we have developed quite a number of new companies that are producing films and television programmes. When there is an achievement of world standing, we really should shout about it. It is a great celebration of Killough in County Down and, of course, Coney Island, which was made so famous previously by Van Morrison. I extend my heartfelt congratulations to Mr George, his daughter, the cast and actors, and all those who made the film very successful.

On Thursday, the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure held a workshop, and a number of the main film and television producers were among those who attended. I know that the industry is one that can go from strength to strength in this part of the world, because we have the product, the people and the scenery.

Mrs McKeivitt: On behalf of the SDLP, I congratulate Terry George, one of my constituents from South Down, and the whole cast of 'The Shore' for winning the Oscar for the best live action short film at the eighty-fourth annual Academy Awards. Their success highlights the massive potential we have in Northern Ireland for cinema and television production. Terry George dedicated his success to the

people of Northern Ireland during his Oscar acceptance speech, but it is we who have to thank him today for his continuing work and support for Irish cinema.

As was highlighted, the cast were from right across Ireland, from Belfast to Ballycastle and from Tipperary to Clare. Those actors represent us on a global scale, and they have participated in some of the biggest cinema and television successes of the past year. Ciarán Hinds, for example, starred in 'Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy' and Conleth Hill stars in the highly successful and — I am proud to say — Belfast-based HBO series 'Game of Thrones'.

Danny Moore, a former chief operating officer of Lough Shore Investments, said that the main reason it invested in 'The Shore' was the impact it could have on the branding of Northern Ireland, as it enters a new era, to the world.

In his speech, Terry George said that we negotiated a peace and proved to the world that the Irish are great talkers. The film is about someone who fled to America because of the Troubles. God, what a difference peaceful times have had on our shores when people, particularly our youth, are leaving for totally different reasons.

It is only fitting that we will be discussing the centenaries of historic events later today in the Assembly. The film shows that, even though we may have come through difficult times, our lives can be improved by understanding and respect for each other's beliefs and history.

In closing, I again congratulate Terry and his team for their success, and I urge the Minister to continue to ensure that her Department works to highlight the potential that Northern Ireland has for cinema and television production. I look forward to more great films, not least the one to be filmed in Downpatrick, which will star Brendan Fraser.

Mr Lunn: I add the Alliance Party's congratulations to the comments already made about the film, which I was lucky enough to see last night. It is a lovely piece of work. It is very atmospheric, and it is amazing what can be packed into a relatively short period: it lasts about 25 minutes. It is not overloaded with dialogue either; a lot of it is visual and atmospheric. I thought that it was a terrific piece of work. As others have said, it shows once again what the film industry can do here. Obviously, we have the facilities, the actors and actresses and people like Terry George to write it for us. I did not know until yesterday that he wrote the screenplay for 'In the Name of the Father', which was nominated all those years ago. Goodness knows how on earth he did not win for that as well.

I heard this morning that the film is being made for download, rather than for cinema viewing, but that is the way nowadays. People will see it on their computer screens and tablets, but it is a pity that it could not be seen on the full screen because it would look really well. The scenery around Coney Island, Killough and the Mourne was stunning. It is a marvellous piece of work. Congratulations to Mr George and all of his crew.

Ministerial Statements

North/South Ministerial Council: Waterways

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure):

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. With your indulgence and before I go into the body of the statement, I put on record our thanks and appreciation to Mr George, his family and all those involved in 'The Shore'. A small investment from the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) has gone a long way to brand our industry here.

Mr Speaker, with your permission, I wish to make a statement in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, regarding the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) inland waterways meeting, which was held in Enniskillen on 14 February 2012.

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

The Council received a progress report from Mr John Martin, chief executive of Waterways Ireland, on the work of Waterways Ireland, including the following significant achievements: the provision of 862 metres of additional moorings in 2011, including 84 metres at Castle Hume, County Fermanagh, 525 metres at Killaloe, County Clare, 62 metres at Aghalane, County Fermanagh and 191 metres at Terryglass, County Tipperary; the completion of the 2011 sponsorship programme, with over 63 events being sponsored across all navigations; the provision of three new publications to promote and support the use of the waterways; ongoing maintenance of the waterways with 99.98% of waterways remaining open during the boating season; the completion of a revised marketing strategy; and the provision of an agreement that enables Waterways Ireland to act as an agent for the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure to make prosecutions under article 53 of the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 and by-law 19 of the Lough Erne by-laws.

12.15 pm

The Council noted progress on the development of Waterways Ireland's 2012 business plan and budget and it received a progress report on restoration work for the Clones to Upper Lough Erne section of the Ulster canal. Ministers noted that a formal planning application was submitted to the relevant authorities in both jurisdictions in October 2011 and that planning permission had been received from Cavan County Council. Monaghan County Council and Clones Town Council have sought further information from Waterways Ireland on the planning application. Waterways Ireland will present to the next NSMC inland waterways meeting a discussion paper setting out the options for advancing the Ulster canal project.

The Council considered four specific recommendations concerning Waterways Ireland. It agreed to refer the following recommendations for endorsement to the June 2012 NSMC plenary meeting: sponsor Departments to consider options for the setting up of a board that comprises fewer than 12

members and to present proposals for consideration at a future NSMC inland waterways meeting; sponsor Departments to implement as appropriate, through changes to legislation or other administrative means, a de minimis provision for dealing with Waterways Ireland's disposal of a waterway or part of a waterway; sponsor Departments to review current provisions for Waterways Ireland's commercial activities to ensure that they are adequate and to report to a future NSMC inland waterways meeting; and, taking account of current economic and fiscal circumstances, no further action to be taken at this time to extend Waterways Ireland's remit.

The Council consented to a number of property disposals. It agreed to hold its next meeting on inland waterways in summer 2012. Go raibh maith agat.

Miss M McIlveen (The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure): The Minister will be aware that the Committee received a delegation on the Newry to Portadown canal with regard to the canal's inclusion under Waterways Ireland's remit. Was that issue raised at the NSMC? If so, what was the outcome? How can the Minister's Department assist associations that restore sections of canals that fall outside Waterways Ireland's remit, given the potential economic and social benefits to communities in those areas?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Committee Chairperson for her question. The Newry canal and others that are not within Waterways Ireland's remit are not normally discussed during those meetings. I am not in a position to answer specific questions on that canal. However, I will provide a full answer to the Member. My understanding is that the inclusion of any canals or waterways that are not the responsibility of Waterways Ireland may potentially require legislation. I am happy to write to the Member on the issue that she has raised.

Mr Ó hOisín: Will the Minister give an assurance that the environmental and heritage aspects of our waterways can be safeguarded?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I can absolutely assure the Member that the environmental and heritage aspects of waterways will be safeguarded. The Member will be aware that it is important to try to reach a balance between preserving canals' heritage features and providing opportunities for tourism, particularly with regard to boating and cruising. The requirement for a formal environmental impact assessment on any works should prevail. We need to look at waterways and such sites as living assets. To that end, we are really keen to make sure that the environment is protected and a balance is sought between that and tourism.

Mr Swann: Can the Minister provide clarification on the option to set up a board that comprises fewer than 12 members to present proposals for consideration at a future NSMC meeting on inland waterways? Would that not be the establishment of a further North/South quango to advise the North/South Ministerial Council? If that board is established, what would it discuss, who would decide its remit, and who would be on it?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. In my statement, I said that proposals are being brought forward on the board. Waterways Ireland is the largest of the North/South bodies, yet it does not have a board. Bringing forward proposals for a board does not suggest that there are any issues. However, for the largest body not to have a board

is not in keeping with good practice in governance. To that end, it will have a board. Proposals for it will be brought forward at the next NSMC meeting. I am happy to share the outcome of that meeting with Mr Swann, other members of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure and, indeed, other Members.

Mrs McKeivitt: One of the four specific recommendations considered at the meeting was a change to the legislation for the disposal of a waterway or part of a waterway by Waterways Ireland. Why does Waterways Ireland need that power? Does it have any plans to make such disposals?

Ms Ní Chuilín: We want to give Waterways Ireland the authority to dispose of small areas of land without needing approval from both Departments. That provision will be de minimis and will cover the disposal of land that is worth less than £25,000. It will also allow for good practice and good governance, and will ensure that there is a clear understanding of what Waterways Ireland can and cannot do. The creation of such a provision has been raised before and we said that we would bring it forward. Therefore, this is progress and, through it, we are providing clarity.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for her statement. The Minister said that the next NSMC waterways meeting will set out:

“options for advancing the Ulster Canal project.”

Is there any hint that that project may be curtailed or that less will be done than was formerly envisaged?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. Some time ago, the Irish Government made a statement that their budget for developing some of the capital works that they had committed to was under threat. The Ulster canal was mentioned in that statement.

At previous NSMC waterways meetings, we agreed to progress that project as much as possible. One of the first stages of the programme of work was to seek leave for planning permission, and that has happened. The project will be kept under constant review at each stage, and the Ulster canal project is firmly at the top of the agenda of NSMC waterways meetings and other meetings that I have with Minister Deenihan. Any progress on that project will be reported at the next NSMC waterways meeting in June.

Mr Irwin: Can the Minister give us any more detail on the Council consenting to “a number of property disposals”?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Council approved the disposal of four properties that required NSMC approval, all of which are in the South of Ireland. None of the disposals was deemed to be contentious or financially significant. I will try to find out where those properties are and write to the Member.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her detailed statement. Will the Minister tell us what progress has been made on the Clones to Upper Lough Erne section of the Ulster canal?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. As I said to Kieran McCarthy, planning applications have been submitted in both jurisdictions to progress the work on that part of the Ulster canal. In the previous statement that I gave to the House on a NSMC waterways meeting, I indicated that planning permission would be sought, and that has now happened. As I said to Kieran McCarthy, I will

meet Minister Deenihan before the next waterways meeting to find out what other progress has been made. That programme of work is on schedule.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for her statement. She mentioned the Ulster canal and, in particular, the Clones to Upper Lough Erne portion of that canal. Will she give us details of the costings of the entire Ulster canal project and, in particular, the Clones to Upper Lough Erne portion, for which planning permission has now been sought? Have those costings been reviewed recently?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member has asked several questions about the Upper Lough Erne section of the Ulster canal, as he does anyway.

The 2006 business case indicated a capital cost of £171.5 million for the restoration of the entire canal. That included site navigation, an environmental impact assessment and project management and construction costs. The estimated costs to restore the Clones to Upper Lough Erne section is currently €45 million. The construction costs for that section will be entirely funded by the Irish Government, and, when it is built, my Department will contribute ongoing operational costs that are estimated at £37,000 per annum.

Mr McCartney: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas. I thank the Minister for her statement and her answers so far. Will she outline how Waterways Ireland intends to raise the profile of our inland waters as a vital tourist product?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. Waterways Ireland’s marketing and promotion strategy was launched away back in 2004 and revised in 2011. The 2011-16 marketing and promotion strategy was drafted in consultation with all key stakeholders of the market advisory group, which includes organisations such as Fáilte Ireland and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. The revised strategy is currently being implemented and will build on the success of the previous strategy. I agree with the Member’s sentiments; it is vital that we use our inland rivers and waterways to promote tourism, particularly in those towns and villages that rely practically solely on the tourism product.

Mr D Bradley: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas a thug sí dúinn ar maidin. Ba mhaith liom an méid seo leanas a fhiafraí di. I thank the Minister for her statement. Is she, in principle, in favour of extending Waterways Ireland’s remit, given improved fiscal and economic conditions?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am, in principle, trying to look for opportunities to extend the canals and waterways. That was not raised at the NSMC meeting, nor was it included in my statement. I can say that I am, in principle, in favour of extending it. Does that mean to say that it will happen if the budget is there? Absolutely not, but I will look at the potential for that. In our towns and villages, as I said to Raymond McCartney, our canals and rivers have a major role to play in key tourism opportunities. As an Executive, we need to exploit that as best we can.

Ms Ritchie: I thank the Minister for her statement. Reference has already been made to the tourism potential of inland waterways, and I note that the Minister has said that there is an ongoing review. Considering the importance of waterways to tourism development, particularly in the north-eastern part of this island, will she outline what

further support is required, if any, from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Fáilte Ireland, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, Tourism Ireland and the equivalent Department in the South to pump-prime tourism in order to increase revenue potential and the well-being of the people?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question. As she knows more than most in the Chamber, given the fact that those details were not in the statement, she is asking almost theoretical questions that were not covered at the NSMC meeting. I am happy to write to the Member with a list of the questions that she has raised today, and I thank her for raising them.

Mr Allister: I note that, this morning, the Minister was able to tell us that the statement was made under “the Northern Ireland Act”, which was progress from her usual shorthand of “the NI Act”.

I want to ask her about that part of her statement that relates to the St Andrews Agreement review proposition of a board for Waterways Ireland. Is that for an advisory board or a management board? Given that Waterways Ireland has been running for many years without a board, why is it now thought necessary, or is it just jobs for the boys that will add to the expense of Waterways Ireland?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am sure that the Member heard the answer that I gave to Robin Swann about setting up a board. One of the recommendations of the St Andrews review report was that a 12-person executive management board be appointed to direct Waterways Ireland’s affairs. Waterways Ireland is the biggest of the North/South bodies with no board; therefore, it is in keeping with good policy, practice and governance that options and proposals to establish a board will be brought to the next NSMC meeting.

12.30 pm

North/South Ministerial Council: Languages

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure):

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. With your permission, in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following report on the fourteenth North/South Language Body meeting, the tenth since the restoration of the NI Executive and Assembly, and the first held in 2012. This statement has been agreed with junior Minister Bell, who was the accompanying Minister. I attended the meeting, held in Enniskillen on 14 February 2012, representing the NI Executive as Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, along with Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) junior Minister Jonathan Bell MLA. The Irish Government were represented by Dinny McGinley TD, Minister of State with special responsibility for Gaeltacht Affairs. Minister of State McGinley chaired the meeting.

The meeting dealt with issues relating to the language body and its two constituent agencies, the Boord o Ulstèr-Scotch — the Ulster-Scots Agency — and Foras na Gaeilge — the Irish Language Agency. I will now present a summary of the issues discussed by the Council on 14 February 2012.

The Council received progress reports from Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency on collaborative work and other activities of the two agencies, including training and induction for new board members and plans for language body board meetings; the development of an agenda for cultural showcases for 2012, including participation in the Olympic torch relay; sharing expertise and resources on a range of corporate and HR issues; the revision of the equality scheme for the language body; and agreed contracts of employment. Foras na Gaeilge’s examination system for Irish language editors was established, and accreditation certificates were presented to the first cohort of eight editors in November 2011. Foras na Gaeilge was awarded a three-year contract to provide specialist Irish language courses to the public sector for the 2011-14 period. In excess of 8,000 participants received music and dance tuition during 2011 from peripatetic tutors funded under a scheme provided by the Ulster-Scots Agency, and reviews of the Ulster-Scots Agency’s financial assistance and community workers’ schemes were completed in 2011.

The North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) approved the North/South Language Body corporate plan for 2011-13 and the business plan and budget for 2011, and noted progress on the development of the 2012 business plan and budget. The Council noted that the consolidated language body 2008 annual report and draft accounts are being compiled for submission to the Comptrollers and Auditors General and the NSMC with a view to laying them before the Houses of the Oireachtas and the Assembly in spring 2012. Ministers also noted that a revised process to simplify and speed up the consolidation of accounts has been introduced and that work is in hand with a view to laying the accounts for 2009 and 2010 during 2012.

The Council noted progress made by the Ulster-Scots Agency in developing and introducing quality indicators for its tuition programme. The agency has adopted the quality indicators across a number of work programmes, which demonstrate high-value outcomes and increased value for money.

Ministers also noted how quality indicators are supporting the accreditation for schools initiative.

Ministers noted the progress that has been made to date by Foras na Gaeilge with regard to the ongoing consultation. The Council agreed that in the context of continuing to achieve satisfactory progress, interim funding may continue to be provided by Foras na Gaeilge to the existing core funded bodies until 30 June 2013. A further progress report will be presented at the next NSMC language body meeting. The Council noted progress to date in regard to the recommendations of the review of Áis, the book distribution service of Foras na Gaeilge, and the agreement of a detailed implementation plan with the sponsor Departments.

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

Ministers noted the announcement by the Irish Government, in their public service reform plan published on 17 November 2011, of the cancellation, in light of the current difficult economic situation, of the decentralisation programme, with some projects being cancelled, others being left in situ and others being reviewed. The Council tasked officials of the sponsor Departments with considering, in consultation with Foras na Gaeilge, the possible implications arising and to report back to a future NSMC meeting in language sectoral format.

The Council considered a number of recommendations specific to the language body and agreed to forward the following recommendations for consideration to the June 2012 NSMC plenary meeting. First, no further action is required concerning engagement between the language body agencies, sharing of services between the agencies and consolidation of accounts since work is already under way to address each of those issues. Secondly, no further action is required concerning the remit of the Ulster-Scots Agency to take forward work associated with the promotion of the Ulster-Scots language and culture outside the island of Ireland. Legal advice has indicated that the existing legislation presents no difficulty with that. Thirdly, the sponsor Departments will continue to assist the Ulster-Scots Agency to achieve value for money within existing budgetary constraints. Fourthly, no action is required at present concerning an increase in the board membership of the Ulster-Scots Agency. That issue will be kept under review, subject to consideration of the legislative and financial implications.

The Council agreed to hold its next language body meeting in summer 2012.

Miss M McIlveen (The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure): I welcome the fact that there is no difficulty with the Ulster-Scots Agency broadening its work outside Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. Will the Minister actively help it to promote that work?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I will actively help the Ulster-Scots Agency to promote that work. In fact, I think that it would acknowledge the work that I have done to date to get it this far and, indeed, the work of the Finance Minister and the Department of Finance and Personnel. I am particularly keen to talk to other Executive colleagues about how we get the agency's work advanced and even mainstreamed through, for example, facilitating meetings with Ministers. A meeting with the Department of Education will take place fairly soon to look at the work of the Ulster-Scots Agency in promoting

cultural heritage and awareness in schools. It is a very good project that is still in development, but it is moving on with consent, support and approval. I thank the Member for her question, and I will keep her updated on progress.

Mr Ó hOisín: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an dara ráiteas a rinne sí inniu. I thank the Minister for her second statement today. Was the Minister given prior notice of the Irish Government's announcement to cancel their decentralisation programme? What are the implications for Foras na Gaeilge?

Ms Ní Chuilín: In short, I was not given prior notice by the Irish Government regarding their decentralisation programme, particularly in Gaoth Dobhair. I am on record, during the meeting on Valentine's Day in Enniskillen, as expressing my disappointment at the decision to cancel the decentralisation programme and at not having been given notice of it. I understand that the decision to decentralise parts of Foras na Gaeilge to Gaoth Dobhair was originally taken as far back as 2003, but, as I said, the decision was taken unilaterally by the Irish Government, and no consultation was held with me. Failing to implement a programme may impact adversely on the development of the language, particularly in rural areas, and it may create significant difficulties for Foras na Gaeilge and people who are awaiting those services in that area.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for her statement. The Council received a review of the Ulster-Scots Agency's financial assistance and community workers scheme, which completed in 2011. What is the Minister's assessment of that scheme?

Ms Ní Chuilín: My assessment is that the scheme and the proposals to extend beyond North/South to east-west are very ambitious. They are also in keeping with the work of the British-Irish Council on east-west dimensions. We were responsible for looking at Slí Cholmcille, the scheme itself and other aspects of the scheme, such as the community work and summer schools. It was introduced in 1999 and received significant programme support in 2006 to increase the number of schools and applications that will be continued. The scheme has completed. Community workers are involved, and there is additional support. The Ulster-Scots Agency has rolled out the scheme and got other people in the community interested, and I am sure that the Member will share my view that this is an opportunity for people to get on board, create an awareness of what happens and see how it can be further developed throughout the Ulster-Scots community in the future.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom an méid seo a fhiafraí den Aire: an bhfuil sí sásta go bhfuil Foras na Gaeilge ag dul i gcomhairle leis na heagraíochtaí croí-mhaoinithe le teacht ar chomh-réiteach ar mhúnlú na samhla nua maoinithe agus go bhfuil níos mó i gceist leis an síniú ar an chomhairliúchán ná tuilleadh den mhéid a bhí againn cheana féin.

I thank the Minister for her statement. Is she satisfied that Foras na Gaeilge is engaging meaningfully with the core-funded Irish language organisations in order to shape the new funding model in such a way that those organisations are not threatened by it? Is she happy that the extension to the consultation is useful and is not just more of the same?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. As the Member is aware, the consultation is ongoing and will not finish until 2 April this year. We received a progress report from Foras na Gaeilge on the ways in which the consultation is progressing, and I am satisfied with what I have heard. I appeal to the Member and other Members who were working closely with the Irish language community well before most that if they have any other suggestions about how Foras na Gaeilge could enrich and enhance the consultation process, I would be happy to forward those on, because I believe that there should be an opportunity for as many people as possible, beyond the 19 funded groups, to have a say on it.

The proposed extension to June 2013 is fair, given that the consultation is fairly significant. People who are doing good work need to have the security of an additional extension. It would be inappropriate for me to make any other comment, at this stage, about what that may look like or what should or should not happen, particularly as the consultation is ongoing. I am happy with the Member's continued interest and look forward to hearing from him, or anybody else, about additional opportunities that Foras na Gaeilge could use to help people to feed into the consultation.

Mr McCarthy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Go raibh maith agat to the Minister. In her statement, the Minister mentioned that Foras na Gaeilge awarded a three-year contract to provide specialist Irish language courses to the public. Does tha Boord o Ulstèr-Scotch not have a similar contract to provide specialist Ulster-Scots language courses? Is that not a case of the Ulster-Scots language and Ulster-Scots Agency falling further behind?

Ms Ní Chuilín: To take his last point first: no, it is not a case of the Ulster-Scots Agency falling behind. It is a case of trying to meet the demand. The Ulster-Scots Agency did not bring forward proposals at this stage, but that is not to say that it will not in the future. I appreciate the Member's interest in this, and I appreciate him using his cúpla focal, as he has done persistently. I thank him for his interest. I will share any further details on how the scheme will be rolled out by Foras na Gaeilge for public sector workers with the Committee in the first instance, and I will write to the Member.

Mr Irwin: I note that progress has been made in relation to accounts. I note that accounts for 2009-2010 are expected this year, in 2012. When does the Minister expect to have the accounts for 2011?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Minister — sorry, William; not yet. The Member will be aware that there was a fairly substantial backlog across all the accounts and plans, but that is now getting cleared up. It took a bit longer to have the 2011 business plans and the 2011-13 corporate plans improved because, as I mentioned earlier, the work that Minister Wilson and I were involved in around the Ulster-Scots Agency corporate plan and business plan regarding east-west links took some time. We had to check to make sure that we had the legal authority and that we did not require additional legal permission to do so. That was done. We did that in a diligent way. As the Member will be aware through his position as Deputy Chair of the Committee, the accounts need to be cleared in order. All that can be done is done. Each time we make a statement regarding the accounts and the business and corporate plans, it is actually progress. I thank the Member for his ongoing interest.

12.45 pm

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement. Can she give examples of successful projects being undertaken by Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Work is ongoing on HR and a range of corporate issues. Indeed, one of the best examples of the two agencies working together in recent times has been the revision of equality schemes. The agencies are also helping each other with and are involved in the proposed route of the Olympic torch, as well as in accreditation schemes for schools. Both agencies have been responsible for not only attending each other's events but promoting them. In many respects, both agencies have led by example.

Examples of such work have been given, including Foras na Gaeilge's English/Irish dictionary and the Ulster-Scots Agency's increased number of community development officers. Both agencies have learned a lot from each other and are continuing to work together closely. We can look forward to more joined-up work and to additional programmes coming from shared experience and shared expertise.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for her statement. Like my colleague Miss McIlveen, I, too, welcome the freedom that the agency will be given to work across the North Channel between Ulster and Scotland. I think that that is long overdue.

Given the St Andrews review, why is there no progress on the expansion of the Ulster-Scots Agency board, given that six of the counties of Ulster are in Northern Ireland and that 75% of the budget for the Ulster-Scots Agency comes from the Northern Ireland exchequer? Having served on the agency board, I know that, at times, it is unable to form subcommittees and is sometimes inoperative. So, in my view, expanding the board to bring in more members from Northern Ireland would be common sense and practical.

Ms Ní Chuilín: It may be. The Member has additional experience that others may share, but reviews and considerations of the governance arrangements have given no indication that an increased board membership is needed at this stage. It has nothing to do with finance; it is just that the reports that I have received from Mr Ian Crozier on the progress of the Ulster-Scots Agency, or even from Tom Scott, who is the chair of the board, have given no indication of that need. If those concerns are raised with me, I will be happy to look at them and respond accordingly. However, I am glad to say that although that may have been the Member's experience in the past, it is not the current experience.

Mr Lynch: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas. I thank the Minister for her statement. Does the Minister think that it is appropriate for the CEO of Foras na Gaeilge to make public comments when the consultation process into future funding arrangements is ongoing?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am not surprised that this point has been raised. In fact, I was waiting for Dominic to raise it. As I said, the comments, which were recorded at the meeting, were inappropriate. It is inappropriate for anybody to comment on or to respond to remarks about any of the core-funded groups at this stage, given that the consultation is ongoing. I voiced my disappointment of same.

I repeat the call that this consultation process happened because people in the two Departments — Ministers and officials — listened to what the core-funded groups had to say. Another consultation, which ends on 2 April, was produced as a response. It is really important that people do not provide any impediments or excuses that would allow others to feel that they did not have a full, open and transparent opportunity to feed in to that consultation. I repeat that it is inappropriate for anybody to go beyond what I just said.

Mr McGlone: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht na bhfreagraí a thug sí go nuige. Maidir leis an chuid dá ráiteas a bhain leis an chonradh de thréimhse trí bliana faoi choinne sainchúrsa Gaeilge a chur ar fáil sa réimse poiblí, an féidir leis an Aire a insint dúinn an bhfuil sé ar fáil don stát seirbhís ó Thuaidh agus, go háirithe, cén chuid den réimse poiblí a bhfuil sé ar fáil dó?

I thank the Minister for her previous answer, particularly her response about Foras na Gaeilge's awarding the three-year contract to provide specialist Irish language courses to the public sector. Can the Minister provide us with some detail as to what aspects of the public sector the programme is available to in the North and to the take-up of same? Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. It is always a pleasure listening to Patsy speaking as Gaeilge. The detail of what the programme entails will be brought forward. I am sure that the Member will agree that it is a welcome advancement, particularly in relation to the publication that the then Minister O'Keeffe brought forward in relation to Foclóir, which is an Irish dictionary of parliamentary usage. However, what that means and who can avail themselves of it is under review. It is important that people have the information so that they can get involved in the process, but I will bring the progress on that to DCAL, in the first instance, and then I will be happy to write to the Member with further details.

Mrs McKevitt: Is the three-year contract that was issued for specialist Irish language training available to the public sector in the North?

Ms Ní Chuilín: It will be. In answer to Mr McGlone's colleague's question, the Member is on the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, and I will bring the details of how people can avail themselves of it at the next earliest opportunity to the Committee. As I said, I will also write to her colleague with those details.

Mr Allister: I want to ask the Minister about the vexed issue of the 2008 accounts. When she last reported on a North/South meeting in respect of the language body following the October get-together, she told us:

"the 2008 annual report and draft accounts have been submitted to the comptroller and auditor general (C&AG) in each jurisdiction". — [Official Report, Bound Volume 68, p67, col 1].

Today, speaking of the same accounts, she told us that the report and accounts:

"are being compiled for submission to the Comptrollers and Auditors General".

Which is it? Why are we regressing? How can she tell us in October that they have been submitted, and in February, tell us that they are being compiled for submission? Is the House not due some consistency and transparency on the issue? Just tell us: have they been submitted or are they being prepared for submission? If they are only being prepared, why were we told otherwise in October?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his questions. The North/South language body's 2007 annual report and accounts were laid in June 2011, and my Department is responsible for the delay in having them published. Foras Na Gaeilge is responsible for producing the consolidated reports and accounts for the North/South Language Body. A revised process to simplify and speed up the consolidation of accounts has been agreed by the Comptrollers and Auditors General and Finance Departments, North and South.

Foras Na Gaeilge has temporarily contracted an employee to clear the backlog. Following certification and consolidation, the accounts will be laid before the Assembly and both Houses of the Oireachtas in spring of this year. At the 14 February meeting, I emphasised that I expect a much quicker turnaround of the annual report and accounts. That aspect of the work must be given priority.

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I asked a question about the 2008 report. Why did I get an answer relating to the 2007 report and no explanation as to why, last time, we were told that the 2008 reports had been submitted, yet, today, we have been told that they are being prepared for submission?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The Member has made his point. It is up to the Minister to come back to clarify whatever confusion may have arisen with Mr Allister.

Assembly Business

Statutory Committee Membership

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

Resolved:

That Mr Paul Givan replace Mr Robin Newton as a member of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment. — [Mr Weir.]

Executive Committee Business

Budget Bill: Final Stage

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I beg to move

That the Budget Bill [NIA 4/11-15] do now pass.

Today's Final Stage of the Budget Bill brings to a close the legislative process for this financial year. The House has debated the Budget Bill and Supply resolutions over the past few weeks. I am sure that Members will be very pleased to hear that I do not intend to repeat everything that has been said. I suspect that some Members might repeat what they said previously, but I am not going to indulge in the same tactics.

I have been encouraged, at times, by the nature of the debate, with some Members showing a detailed understanding of the Bill and the rationale for the legislation that is in its Final Stage. The Budget Bill covers the 2011-12 financial year and provides legal authority to spend in the first few months of 2012-13.

Looking at the management of public expenditure in 2011-12, we can see that we began the year with an overcommitment, which we sought to manage through the in-year monitoring process. Throughout the three monitoring rounds, we were able to remove the overcommitment as well as reallocate surplus funding to key areas such as employment, health, education and social concerns. However, we are not finished in 2011-12; we still have a lot to do in the remaining weeks. Ministers must make every effort to ensure that departmental budgets are adhered to, thereby ensuring that we minimise underspend and the risk of having to return unspent funding to the Treasury. That would be a difficult circumstance to explain to citizens, especially at a time when we are saying that we are working our way through one of the tightest Budgets that we have had for some time.

Not only have we still got a lot to do in 2011-12, but the Executive have a responsibility to carry that momentum into the next financial year, the first few months of which are covered in the Budget Bill. We must seek to ensure that public expenditure is fully utilised so that we can give the guarantee to the people of Northern Ireland that we are doing our utmost to put them in a position in which they can weather the economic storm that we all face. That is why the Vote on Account legislation contained in the Bill is so crucial.

I will spend a moment or two reflecting on 2011-12. I have said some of this before, but I think that it bears repeating. One of the things that irks me about the way in which the media treats the Assembly is that it is as if everything is totally mismanaged and that we do not respond quickly to problems that arise and are identified. No credit is given when we get things right. I do not expect to be praised when we get things wrong; in fact, as a public representative and as a Minister, you expect people to probe at the things that you have got wrong. However, when we have done things right and managed money well and, as a result of managing money well, freed up resources that can be used to deal with particular problems, I think that it is worth repeating those successes — even though there will be those in the media in Northern Ireland, and I emphasise that it is in our media, who look for only the bad news and the negatives. Even when you do have positives, those elements look for

some angle on which they can put a negative spin. I know I am repeating myself on these issues, but it is important that we look at some of the achievements in things that we had not planned to do but did, in the past year and within a tight budget.

This year, as an Executive, we were able to provide funding to ensure that student fees in Northern Ireland rose at the rate of inflation and did not make the staggering jumps that have happened in other parts of the United Kingdom.

We have continued to provide the assurances required to protect the schools end-year flexibility scheme, giving much-needed comfort to schools and allowing them to plan with confidence.

1.00 pm

As an Executive, we were able to allocate £12.7 million to the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) for the Steps to Work scheme, to help those who have lost their jobs or who have not yet got a job to get into employment. We have provided 1,400 new starts in our social housing sector and allocated £25 million to co-ownership funding, which will enable many people who are starting off on the housing ladder to get and own a house of their own for the first time. In doing that, we have provided very important funding for jobs in the construction sector. We have invested over £111 million in road structural maintenance, the highest annual spend figure ever recorded, reflecting the importance of having good transport corridors for the growth of our economy. This morning, before I came here, I read a letter from the Quarry Products Association which emphasised how important that was in ensuring that jobs in that part of the construction sector were safeguarded as a result of that spending.

Ms Ritchie: I thank the Minister for giving way. He rightly points out the importance of the construction industry to the local economy and, in particular, to the Quarry Products Association. Has he received any information from the Treasury or the European Commission in relation to the exemption for the aggregates industry? That exemption was withdrawn, and was subject to discussions in the European Commission.

Mr Wilson: As the Member well knows, I have reported to the Assembly on a number of occasions during the past year on the engagement that I have had with Treasury Ministers on that issue. All the information required by the European Commission to look at the scheme and make a decision as to whether it can be restarted is with the Commission. As yet, we do not have a response from the Commission, and I cannot say what the outcome will be. However, the ending of the credit scheme added substantially to the cost of capital projects in Northern Ireland. It probably added about £25 million to the budget for capital schemes, and it has left some uncertainty in the quarry products industry.

I do not believe that Treasury Ministers have dragged their heels on this one. One of the reasons why this has taken so long is that we wanted to present the most robust case that we possibly could to the European Commission. That meant that a lot of data had to be collected from scores of small businesses across Northern Ireland to go into our response to the Treasury.

I do not have an answer to the Member's question as to when we are expecting a response from the Commission. It was always expected that we would have a response at some time in the spring.

On our tourism side, the Titanic signature project is due to open its doors on 31 March, and it will be a focal point for the Titanic centenary year. I believe that it will attract hundreds of thousands of visitors to Northern Ireland over the next number of years. This year, we have secured the Irish Open golf tournament for June 2012, and the associated tourism interest will be a much-needed boost for our local economy. Indeed, Mr Deputy Speaker, I was up in your end of Northern Ireland at the weekend and many of the restaurant owners and shopkeepers in Portrush are looking forward to the injection that that will put into the local economy. I see that the local council is doing a magnificent job of improving the sea frontage there as well, which should make the area more attractive to people. I hope that that will help to bring people back after they have played their game of golf.

I could go on, but I hope that those things give a flavour of the different ways that this Assembly has delivered for our citizens, not to mention the delivery of ongoing, routine public services on a daily basis right across our country.

Moving on to 2012-13, there are, no doubt, similar challenges facing our society and economy. We, as politicians, must step up to the mark to ensure that public services are not only delivered, which is what this Vote on Account legislation intends to facilitate, but delivered to ensure that we are best serving our people.

Mr Murphy (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I thank the Minister for his statement.

Members will be aware that the Budget Bill before us provides the statutory authority for expenditure in 2011-12, as specified in the spring Supplementary Estimates, which take account of what happened during the year's monitoring rounds. The Bill also includes a Vote on Account, which allows public expenditure to continue in the early part of the next financial year, until the Main Estimates for 2012-13 are voted on by the Assembly in early June.

The Committee for Finance and Personnel took evidence on the Budget Bill 2012 from Department of Finance and Personnel officials on 1 February and 8 February this year. Those evidence sessions marked the final stage of a process of scrutiny by the Committee of the 2011-12 in-year monitoring rounds.

In addition to briefings on the Department's position, following the outcome of each monitoring round, the Committee also received briefings on the strategic and cross-cutting issues relating to public expenditure. After the evidence session on 8 February, the Committee recommended that the Bill be granted accelerated passage.

The Bill is about tidying up for the 2011-12 financial year and making provision for the first part of next year. However, I also want to highlight that there is a strategic context, which underpins the legislative passage of this and other such Budget Bills and goes to the heart of the relationship between the Assembly and the Executive.

Under Standing Order 42(2), the Finance and Personnel Committee exercises the unique role of determining whether there has been appropriate consultation on a Budget Bill before deciding on whether to grant a request for accelerated passage. It was against that test that the Committee granted accelerated passage for this Bill. It is on that test that decisions on future Budget Bills will be taken.

On that latter point, the Committee wrote to the Minister regarding a consultation on the upcoming review of Budget allocations for the last two years of the current four-year Budget and highlighted the need to impress upon the Executive the importance of engagement by Departments with their Committees by providing sufficient information in time for scrutiny. Members will be aware that those issues have been raised on a number of occasions by the Chairpersons' Liaison Group and a significant number of Committees.

I welcome the Minister's recent reply in which he recognised the Committee's lead role in co-ordinating the Assembly response to Budgets and financial issues. Nevertheless, to enable the Committee to carry out this role effectively, and to enable all Committees to fulfil their scrutiny function, further clarity is required on the review process, including on issues such as the methodology and the processes to be followed, the basis on which decisions regarding reallocations will be made, the process for seeking Assembly approval and a timescale for the completion of the process.

Moreover, full and timely engagement by Departments with their Committees on the detailed work behind any review proposals will be essential in ensuring effective Assembly input in the process. However, that can be addressed in the coming weeks and months. For today, on behalf of the Committee, I support the motion.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for moving the Final Stage of the Budget Bill. We have quite a bit of time to talk about this and there is no need to stop, so we will run on for as long as it takes. No; without wishing to regurgitate everything that has been said —

Mr Humphrey: Go on.

Mr Girvan: "Go on", I am being told.

Without doing that, I want to say that, although some people had concerns about the use of accelerated passage for the Budget Bill, each Committee and Department has had an opportunity to look at and deal with the relevant areas, scrutinise the ways forward and bring that forward to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). That has been fairly well dealt with.

I have some concern about Departments that might not have satisfied their committed spend and might come back at the eleventh hour to say that they have not been able to make their full spend. That would leave us with a difficulty. I appreciate that some Departments have given money back at an early stage to allow it to be reallocated. That has been a very welcome process. I appreciate that the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) handed some money back at an early enough stage so that it could be reallocated and made use of. I support the Bill.

Mr Cree: I also do not plan to detain the Minister too long. As other Members said, we discussed this matter at some

length at Second Stage, Consideration Stage and, indeed, Further Consideration Stage, despite the fact that there were no amendments. So, it is not really important to rehearse those arguments.

Suffice to say that the Budget and Supply resolutions have to be passed today and I will certainly not stand in the way of that. However, I have a couple of points. As the Finance Minister himself said, it is important that the money is spent this year. It will be taken as a very bad show if Departments have not spent all the money allocated to them in this difficult year.

We also look forward to the June Estimates, when we go into the Main Estimates in more detail. No doubt, that will be good fun. However, I look forward to the time when the completion of the financial review will give us a new set of procedures that will be clear, easily understood and a big improvement for all who are trying to follow what is a difficult subject at this time, namely, to try to make some sense of the Budget. I will certainly be voting to support the Budget Bill.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá áthas orm páirt a ghlacadh sa díospóireacht.

I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate. If my memory serves me correctly, at the beginning of this budgetary process the Minister described the four-year Budget as the best Christmas present that Northern Ireland could hope for. Many disagreed with him then and maybe even more now. However, we are, as they say, where we are.

One surprising thing about last year's finances, to which the Minister referred earlier, was the high level of underspend across a number of Departments. Anyone looking in from outside would think that Northern Ireland was awash with cash at a time when public finances are facing the greatest pressures. It will be interesting to see how we fare in that respect during the coming financial year. I hope we fare much better and I know that the Minister is taking steps to review that issue. I look forward, as a member of the Finance Committee, to engaging in that process.

At Second Stage, Mrs Kelly, I and several others raised the issue of the childcare strategy and its roll-out. The Minister replied that £12 million had been made available over the spending review period to fund the childcare strategy and that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) was leading on the issue. My question is: where are we being led?

Groups in my constituency, such as the South Armagh Childcare Consortium, are living hand to mouth in constant danger of shutdown because that strategy is still not properly developed after almost a year. When spending has been allocated, it is important that the Executive ensure that it is available to groups in dire need of it as quickly as possible and without undue delays.

The Minister said that he was not going to repeat himself. I would not repeat myself either had I been given some of the responses that I had hoped for in earlier Budget debates. At the Second Stage, the Minister conveniently ignored in his responses issues that I felt needed to be answered. I asked him about the £842 million of additional revenue, of which £500 million was to come from asset sales, which he mentioned at the beginning of the budgetary process. To date, I have not heard whether that £500 million has

been realised, and I do not know where the other £342 million will come from. Perhaps the Minister will clarify the situation today and tell us whether the £500 million has been realised from assets and where the £342 million will come from. At the outset, he said that he would factor into the Budget only those figures that could be relied on. I am interested to hear his response on the issue.

1.15 pm

I also mentioned the performance of the assets management unit. To date, after one year, it has realised £1.3 million of a £10 million target, and the Minister seems to believe that the additional £6.7 million will be realised between now and the end of March. I believe that that will be very difficult. It beggars belief that the projected £100 million over the four-year budgetary period will ever be realised. Perhaps the Minister will reassure me; I await his response. However, if the performance of the unit continues as it has done to date, how will that impact on the Budget? At the rate that has been achieved to date, instead of getting £100 million over the four-year period, we are liable, if we are lucky, to get £10 million.

In an earlier debate, I raised the issue of the Minister's intention to reclassify £250 million of current expenditure as capital expenditure over the Budget period, with capital spending reaching, he said, £1.5 billion by 2014-15. Does the Minister still believe that that is achievable, and, if so, what is the progress to date?

I also raised the issue of welfare reform and said that the changes — the cuts — will take an estimated £450 million out of the Northern Ireland economy. I asked what the Executive intended to do to mitigate the effects of those changes. The Minister did not respond. I pointed out that the social protection fund had already been emptied after year 1, before the welfare cuts had even begun to bite. We cannot ignore the fact that the people of Northern Ireland will suffer because of the introduction of the consumer price index to replace the retail price index as the measure to calculate benefits. Families in the North will suffer as a result of the upcoming changes to working tax credits, and children here will suffer as a result of the upcoming changes to child tax credits. People in Northern Ireland will end up homeless as a result of single people under the age of 35 having to change to the shared room rate of housing benefit. We can and must do more in that respect, and although the Budget has not responded to the issue, I believe that the Executive and the Minister for Social Development will have to respond in the future.

Although recognising the investment that has been made in roads in the A5 and the A2, in hospitals at Omagh and Altnagelvin, and the commitment to stadia and other projects and the effect that they will have on the Northern Ireland economy, particularly on the building industry, the SDLP would like the Budget to address issues that it has missed. The promised additional income streams or capital receipts needed to mitigate the £4 billion of cuts have not been realised. We need a greater focus on job creation and plans from the Department for Social Development (DSD) and the Executive to mitigate the effects of welfare cuts. We also need faster progress on the devolution of corporation tax.

We also need improved output from the Executive's Budget review group.

It was possible to reallocate funds during the monitoring rounds of this financial year. I hope that the spending power of Departments vastly improves during the coming year and that we are not left in the same situation that we experienced this year, with sums of money floating around the system unspent. So, I will be interested in, and look forward to hearing, the Minister's response to points that I have raised here today and to which he has not responded in previous debates.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Following the Minister's reference to people not repeating all of their points and arguments, I, too, will generally welcome the work that has gone into presenting the Budget.

There is no such thing as the perfect article, and we have to recognise that the Minister and his officials were engaged in consultation and discussion and that they did their best — in my opinion a creditable best — to pull all of those observations and arguments together. Not everyone will be satisfied, and not everyone will have all of their concerns satisfied.

I made a number of points, one of which still concerns me. It is the definition of the term "social clauses". DFP approached the matter of definition on two points: first, on equality, which is a statutory provision that you would expect to be reflected in contracts anyway; and, secondly, on environment, which is on the basis that we are obliged to deliver on transposed European legislation. I think that many people will be disappointed that the Assembly does not take the concept further, recognising the social and economic conditions that exist and including references to employment opportunities for the long-term unemployed and apprenticeship opportunities and allowing the interface between the Assembly and the green new deal to be broadened. Perhaps the Minister can give some comfort on the matter. I do not expect him to come up with a fully-developed position in response to a question but, perhaps, recognition that this issue is a work in progress that could be advanced through the roll-out of the Budget and the associated Programme for Government commitments.

Other than that, I am content that we have had an opportunity to be consulted and to discuss the issue. A credible job of work has been done, and I support the Budget Bill on that basis.

Mr Eastwood: We are discussing a Budget that is not linked intrinsically to the Programme for Government, leaving the potential for the Programme for Government to remain an aspirational document.

There has also been mixed leadership on the devolution of corporation tax, with the Finance Minister seemingly opposed to greater fiscal powers while the First Minister and deputy First Minister attend meetings with the Treasury seeking them. That is clearly running against the tide of events that was set in train by the competence and confidence of the Scottish Parliament.

It seems that money unspent is the major trait in the North's budgetary pattern. OFMDFM is no exception to that. The childcare strategy is unfinished, leaving £3 million unspent. The victims and survivors service has not yet been established, leaving half a million pounds unspent. The community relations allocation has £1.2 million unspent. The child poverty action plan remains unfinished.

There has been abject failure by OFMDFM to find the promised additional income streams or capital receipts needed to mitigate the £4 billion of cuts. There is no specific allocation set aside, either in OFMDFM or in the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), for the successful implementation of the City of Culture in Derry.

There is no detailed budgetary commitment to Derry's One Plan, and there is no articulation of a plan to expand Magee university or to advance the other catalytic projects in the One Plan. The potential advantage of former military sites has, in many cases, been squandered, and site developments have been characterised by delays and waste.

The commitment to increase European funding by 20% is welcome, but recognition must be given to the fact that we are coming from a very low base, particularly in comparison with the South. Irish European Commissioner Máire Geoghegan-Quinn has an €80 billion innovation fund, which we badly need to utilise.

There is little or no emphasis in the Budget on reskilling workers, primarily construction workers. Initiatives have been taken in the South to provide training through the co-operation of the Education Department and social welfare offices, with hundreds of thousands of people being trained. There is no such commitment here. It is also worrying that budgetary advances in North/South terms seem to have been stalled. That needs to be remedied.

The Budget lacks any real focus on job creation, and there is a weakness in the Executive in dealing with the threats to people who are among the poorest in our society and who are threatened by the oncoming onslaught of welfare reform. The devolution of corporation tax-varying powers is moving far too slowly.

The politics of the Budget is equivalent to a splash of bright paint on a distinctly grey canvas. Political choreography cannot distract from the reality of the deficiency of good government. How can we hope to convince anyone that this Stormont leadership is capable of contending with more fiscal powers when it has shown itself to be unable to fully utilise the block expenditure that is in its possession? That is wholly in contrast to the civic confidence and devolutionary dynamic expressed and engineered by the Scottish Parliament. As our President, Michael D Higgins, reminded us recently, this financial crisis and this age of austerity are as much an intellectual crisis as an economic crisis. It is the task of both people and politics to overcome those twin challenges.

The Budget and the style and substance of the Executive's manner of doing business are more concerned with the expediency of short-term political accolade than sustainable social and economic vision. We cannot use the argument any longer that we are but a small devolved power stranded to the will and momentum of a greater European crisis. This is a failure of both governmental duty and imagination, and it is a failure of the potential capacity that our peace promised.

Mr Wilson: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. You will have noticed how quickly the Enterprise Minister waltzed in here and took over my desk, proceeded to spread her papers all round the place and displace me. I am now a homeless Minister, having to move to another desk. It is just typical, isn't it? She does the same when it comes to money. She

comes in demanding money, and, if she does not get it, she demands my place.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank most of the Members. However, I have to make some comments on the previous two Members who took part in this Final Stage debate on the Budget Bill. As devolution grows, the House is becoming more aware of the nature and substance of these debates. Some Members need one or two reminders from me and some direction from you as to the topic in hand. That lesson still seems to have to be learned by some Members. However, I thank those who took part.

I will say to the Chairman of the Committee that I appreciate the work that the Committee has done and the support that it has given in agreeing to accelerated passage. I noted his remarks, and he has also written to me about the consultation and the process that we will go through on the review of Budgets in the last two years of this four-year Budget.

He asked about the role of Committees etc. One thing that I will say to him is that it is important that we engage, which we will, about what the process will be and how we get information on budget allocations, compare opening positions with closing positions, listen to where pressures are in other Departments' budgets and see what reallocations might have to be made during that period. As regards how Committees decide to engage in that, I do not want to be too prescriptive. Committees must have their own freedom in how they talk to their respective Ministers and officials about the review. However, there is work to be done. The review will start when we have got to the final position in June and we know where the starting and final positions are. We will certainly have until autumn to work our way through that. As Members will know, there will be no reallocations in the next financial year. That is impossible because we will not have the data until June, which is in the middle of the financial year. So, it will be for the last two years.

1.30 pm

Mr Cree talked about how money had been spent. In a moment, I will deal with the points that were made by the SDLP on that. I must say that there seems to be a view among some Assembly Members that, if Departments give money back, somehow or other that is a failure. It is not a failure. Often, reallocations are made and money is given back because Departments have done the job that we wanted them to do, which is to look for efficiencies and ensure that money is not misused or spent unwisely. Of course, if money is not spent in one way, it is available for reallocation in others.

There are occasions — I say this despite the fact that the Minister took over my desk — when spending in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is demanded. If demand does not materialise, the Enterprise Minister can hardly say, "Well, there is no demand, but we will give the money out anyway". In fact, she would be pilloried by the Assembly for so doing. Members need to be careful when they talk about how money was spent.

Mr Cree pointed out that, when we come to the June Estimates, we can look again at all the spending for next year. He described it as good fun. I am not sure that a debate on the Budget can be described as good fun. However, if that is fun for Mr Cree, we will look forward to it.

I want to deal with the two contributions from the —

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for giving way. Before he moves on, I want to deal with the underspend. During the current year, one Department asked for some £20 million, which it required urgently. Three months later, it actually ended up handing back £10 million. Surely there is something wrong with that system.

Mr Wilson: I am not sure what Department the Member is referring to. If he actually specified which Department it was, I may well be able to give some explanation for that. Of course, do not forget —

Mr Cree: It was the Department of Education.

Mr Wilson: I heard someone say that it was the Department of Education. I explained the arrangement that there would be for that Department. When we lost end-year flexibility, there was a fear that all the money that schools had saved from previous years would be lost. Schools began to spend money very unwisely simply to get rid of it after the previous Education Minister announced that it could be lost. At that stage, I intervened. I told schools not to spend that money unnecessarily and that we would find a mechanism by which to carry it over. The Department of Education could make a bid based on its estimation of what schools would want to spend. Schools decided that they did not want to spend all of it and wanted to carry it over into the next financial year.

My only criticism of the Department of Education is that it left it until February before it decided to surrender that money when it could have been clear earlier in the year — probably by October — which schools wanted to spend. Indeed, there should have been better monitoring. I have said that publicly. I have said that my officials will work with officials in the Department of Education to make sure that the remaining £45 million that has been saved, which is available to schools, is better managed or, at least, better monitored and that we can better predict what schools will spend.

I do not want to mix the remarks that were made by Mr McLaughlin with the two sad contributions that were made by SDLP Members. At least Mr McLaughlin recognised the realism of any Budget. He said:

“There is no such thing as the perfect article”.

He is absolutely right. Given the constraints that we work under and are forced to recognise, when we look at the Budget at a later stage, of course we could say that we could have done it better. There are things that we would like to have included but could not include; there are things that we thought would happen that did not happen; and there are things that happened that we did not expect to happen. A Budget is a living document. Our personal budgets are like that, for goodness' sake, never mind the £12,000 million Budget that the Executive have to spend every year. We live in a world in which there are constraints, so of course it will not be perfect.

I think that there was at least recognition from Mr McLaughlin that the Budget was not approached with some kind of gung-ho attitude. We — at least some of the parties in the Assembly — took our responsibilities seriously when it came to the Budget. We recognised that how we allocate and spend money impacts on the lives of our constituents.

It impacts on their ability to get a good education, to get hospital treatment and to get the transport that they need and on a range of other things. I take from Mr McLaughlin's remarks the fact that he and his party played a constructive role in trying to ensure that the Budget was the best article that we could produce, albeit imperfect in places. When there is a coalition, compromises are involved, and not everyone got their own way. There were things that I wanted in the Budget that I did not get, and there were things that Mr McLaughlin's party wanted that it did not get. When there are limited resources, you have to negotiate. That is the proper way of doing it.

Mr McLaughlin also mentioned social clauses and their importance beyond the equality and health and safety issues. We have made a lot of progress in that area. Social clauses that require the taking on of apprentices and the long-term unemployed apply not only to many of the capital projects that the Executive undertake but to some of the service contracts, even though the situation is a bit more difficult in those cases. My Department awards a service contract for the maintenance of public buildings, and I think that about 40 apprenticeships — I hope I have the figure right — have been created over the four years of that contract. We are building them into the contract, although it is a bit more difficult to do that with smaller, more service-orientated contracts. Social clauses are mentioned in the Programme for Government. Indeed, when I go out to see projects in action, I ask those responsible how they have included social clauses in contracts, and there is evidence that apprentices and the long-term unemployed have been taken on as a result of conditions that were tied into those contracts. There is more work to be done in that area, and we will continue with that.

I want to move on to the two contributions that we had from the SDLP. I mentioned the negative attitude of the media, but I do not think that we need the media when we have the SDLP. If ever there was a party that seems to be mired in gloom, doom, despair and negativity, it is that party. It is not a bit of wonder that it is sinking. If I had the kind of black cloud hanging over my head that some SDLP Members have hanging over them, I would give up the will to live. Politically, that is what they have done. They have talked themselves into gloom and doom and do not see any brightness on the horizon.

No wonder they find it difficult to compete with the party beside them. It is a penalty kick. If you have people who are as demotivated as that crowd over there, you would not even have to fight an election; you could just walk past them. You would think that maybe the new blood in the SDLP might have a different attitude. However, I see that Mr Eastwood now has the master of doom and gloom sitting beside him to hold his hand and make sure that he does not get a smile on his face.

Mr Humphrey: He is the apprentice.

Mr Wilson: That is right; he is the apprentice whinger. He is the apprentice gloom and doom merchant. If Mr Bradley was bad, Mr Eastwood was worse. Let us look at some of the things that they said. Mr Bradley started off with a phrase that he loves. It is the one that I used when, shortly before Christmas 2010, I announced that we had finally reached the Budget agreement and said that it was a Christmas present for the people of Northern Ireland. It was in reference to the fact that everyone had said that the SDLP

the Ulster Unionists, the DUP and Sinn Féin would never be able to agree a Budget. That was true: we could not get the other two to agree, but the two parties that had the votes to get the Budget through did so after hard negotiations. We did so not for one year to get us past the embarrassment of the election but for a four-year Budget with which we could honestly go to the people of Northern Ireland in the election the following May saying that we were not hiding anything from them. We told them what they were getting over the next four years and to vote on that basis. We were not going to make them wait until after the election and then give them the bad news. There was a degree of maturity there, and, despite the risks that were involved in getting a four-year Budget and the problems of showing our hand for the next four years and going to the electorate, we took those risks. We believed that that was needed and that it was the kind of certainty that people were asking for, whether they were from business or the social or community sectors, the Civil Service, public bodies or the people contracted to them. We gave them that certainty. That was a good decision, and I stand over it.

I love all this from the SDLP. Just listen to what Mr Bradley said. He said that there was a high level of underspend this year and that he hoped that I would do much better next year. I do not know what he means by that. Does he mean that he does not want any underspend next year or that he does not want Departments to look for efficiencies? Does he not want to look for ways of not spending money on things that, perhaps, are not necessary and give it back so that we can better use it? This year, part of the reason for the underspend was that we cut administration costs by 3.8%. Is he hoping that we do much better next year and do not cut administration costs at all? Then he said that we had to do something about welfare reform, to help all the people who would be hurt as a result of it. I would have thought that, perhaps, if he wanted us to do something, he might make some suggestions. He made a suggestion in the previous debate, although, unfortunately, he did not repeat it today. He said that we could ask for the devolution of motor tax. Perhaps we could put motor tax up by about 15 million per cent for motorists and raise all that money to help people who are affected by welfare reform. That was the only extra source of revenue that he mentioned. He also said that we had to —

Mr McGlone: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: I will give way in a wee minute. He said that we had to have increased output from the Budget review group. I do not know what he means by that. He asked whether we had realised our £500 million of capital receipts. Do not forget that we are in the first year of the Budget. How naive could one be? He is asking us whether we had realised that amount in the first year of the Budget, when the property market is down and we have not even identified what some of the assets will be. He expects us to have all that realised. If you are going to whinge, at least get something of substance to whinge about before you start. That is the kind of thing that we have heard from the SDLP.

1.45 pm

Mr McGlone: I thank the Minister for giving way. I heard him refer specifically to welfare reform, which is a crucial issue for people on benefits and people who are on working tax credit. Minister, maybe you were not here for the vote last

week when the SDLP tabled a motion on welfare reform to do precisely what you suggest: to set up an ad hoc Committee to go through the reforms line by line and to deal with issues of local relevance to the many people who will be affected, including the 20% of recipients of disability living allowance who will be whacked. What happened? Your party colleagues rejected it. It is important to put that matter on record. That was an opportunity to go through it all and come up with issues that are of real relevance to the many people who are on and below the breadline. You and your colleagues rejected it.

Mr Wilson: I thought that, at least, I would get a point that would give me something to answer. I know that the SDLP is a dysfunctional party and its members do not talk to each other. They talk about each other to other people. Perhaps he should talk to his party's Minister. There is already such a group. In fact, it is a group of people who are actually capable of making decisions about this. It is an Executive ministerial group, and it has representation from all the parties on the Executive. What is it doing? It is looking precisely at that. It is considering the implications of welfare reform for Northern Ireland and what might be done.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I know that you are being advised that I have digressed from the subject, but I have been waylaid by the SDLP. I will not wander too far because I do not want you to rule me out of order.

There is such a subcommittee, and we are looking at what can and cannot be done locally. The one thing that I make quite clear is that the scaremongering of the SDLP that we will lose £600 million in welfare benefits and that half of the population will be on the poverty line or on the streets and children will be in poverty is so much nonsense. The SDLP cannot credibly produce a figure that shows that £600 million will be taken out of the economy as a result of welfare reform. That is not true. There are things that we can and must do, but, equally, we have to recognise that there are things that we could not afford to do. Westminster has made it clear that, while we hold to parity in the levels of welfare payments, it will fund the bill. Once we move from parity, we can fund it ourselves. No increase in motor tax will ever give us enough revenue to do that job.

As he did before, the Member raised the issue of childcare and the child strategy. He rightly said that it is the responsibility of OFMDFM and that only £300,000 of the £3 million was spent this year. The Executive have given approval to carry over the underspend to next year, when the strategy will be agreed and the allocations can be made. SDLP Members love to poke OFMDFM on that, but I guarantee that, if OFMDFM had rushed in, in spite of the fact that there are widespread and different views on how that money should be spent, with a scheme that did not have buy-in from all the people who will be affected, the SDLP would have been the first to complain about lack of consultation and the heavy-handed way in which the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the two leading parties in the Assembly impose their will on everyone. When you take time to bring along all the players, you get complaints about why you have not spent the money. You cannot have it both ways. Either you want to bring people along and you recognise that that takes time, or else you rush in and say, "Right, this is what the scheme will be", and you are accused of being heavy-handed and disregarding the views of the people. If something goes wrong with the

scheme or the money is not spent in a way that people like, they will probably say, "Did we not tell you so?".

The Member raised the issue of the additional revenue for capital receipts and the fact that the asset management unit has not raised the £10 million that it was to raise this year. I drew that to the Assembly's attention. I did not have to do that. Nobody asked me a question about it, but I brought it to the Assembly's attention because I wanted to make it quite clear. We set challenging targets for raising revenue from assets, and there was a process to go through in identifying what those assets might be and getting them on to the market and sold. We are selling them at a particularly difficult time. In the past year, £50 million of the £100 million was allocated because we wanted to give time for the market to, hopefully, improve so that we could raise those sales.

The Member talked about the other £500 million. It is totally naïve for anyone to think that we will raise £500 million in one year. I never made such a claim; no Executive Minister did. The assets are to be realised by Departments. Here is a real discipline on it: many of those assets have been built into Departments' capital programmes. So, there is an incentive for Departments, which, first, identified the assets themselves. We did not identify them. I did not identify them. They were identified by Departments, and Departments then built them into their programmes. If they do not realise them, they will, of course, suffer the consequences of that. However, the important thing is that they were put in only after Departments had identified that they were surplus to requirements and were marketable. Over the period, we will be able to realise the money from them.

The Member asked whether we had gone askew already, about what the capital spend is — it is £1.4 million in the past year, not £1.5 million — and about the performance to date. Had he been listening to the debate, he would have known that the reason why we have the spring Supplementary Estimates and why we do not know the final budgetary position is that we will not know the final spend of Departments probably until about June of next year. However, no Department so far has indicated a substantial capital underspend in this year, apart from the Department of Justice, which is exempt from having to give money back. I am fairly sure that, when the figures turn out, we will have spent our £1.1 billion this year, and some of that, of course, will have been financed by capital receipts that Departments brought in.

Mr McLaughlin: I want to ask about the capital receipts and the disposal of surplus assets. The market is volatile and is continuing to settle. We have already had a commitment in the Budget review for the final two years. I wonder if there is built in a review of the value of the assets to Departments, which may have made a projection that perhaps the market in its present volatility is not supporting and is having the effect of maybe preventing people implementing.

Mr Wilson: It does not even have to be a formal review such as that which Member talked about. If an asset has been put up for sale and expressions of interest have been made, those expressions of interest may not necessarily reflect the value that had been put on the asset by LPS and, therefore, the value in the Department's accounts. Very often — I can think of ones that I have looked at recently — that Department will simply negotiate with the potential buyer. There have to be limits to that negotiation. If

a ludicrous figure comes in, of course we would not expect to give it away. I can think of examples that came across my desk recently where the asset might have been valued at, say, £500,000 and, in the end, went for a sum less than that, but that was as a result of negotiation. I do not think that any Department will hold out if it does not get the final penny for an asset that has been put on the market. We do not need that to be widespread; it can be done on a one-to-one basis.

I come to the points that Mr Eastwood raised. It is sad to see that someone so young has got himself into a state of despair. Usually, the youth have idealism that lifts them beyond the circumstances in which they find themselves and helps to pull them out of the mud and the mire and look to the horizon for a brighter future. However, I am afraid that the young people of the SDLP have their eyes as firmly on the ground as some of the older members who have been beaten and battered by electoral defeat after electoral defeat and have therefore got into a negative attitude. He spoke about a number of things, including the unspent money. However, I have made the point that unspent money does not mean bad management; unspent money could actually be the result of good management.

Mr D Bradley: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: I will. Indeed, the instances that I have given have shown that it was actually the result of good management.

Mr D Bradley: I thank the Minister for giving way. At the risk of appearing as the sorcerer with my apprentice to my left, I would say that the issue of underspends has been raised by the Minister himself, to the extent that he has initiated a review of departmental spending. He is far from satisfied with the underspends that occurred during this financial year. I did not say that the £500 million in assets should be raised within one year; however, it is clear that progress in realising those assets has been very poor. It is also clear that the assets will not be realised over the budgetary period. I would like the Minister to bear that in mind and tell us how it will impact on the Budget.

Mr Wilson: I noted what the Member said. He asked whether the £500 million had been realised and said that he did not believe that it had. The answer is that no, it has not; it was spread over the four-year period. I have told the Member that, as far as this year's capital spend is concerned, no Department has made me aware that it will substantially underspend on its capital budget. Some of that capital budget will, of course, have been predicated on receipts that it will have brought in.

I raised the issue of the high level of underspend in two contexts. Of course we will review it. In allocating money, if we can identify early where Departments may have been allocated more money than is needed, we can plan better for spending, hence the Budget review. The other underspend that I spoke about is where Departments hold on to money until the last minute and then find that they cannot spend it. Since we can carry over only £60 million, there is a danger that we could lose money if we are left with too much of it. That is one of the reasons that you need early warning of underspend, and Departments are well aware of that.

As I said, Mr Eastwood needs to lift his eyes to the horizon. He mentioned the underspend. He also said — I loved this — that we have lost the potential of the former military

sites. Does he ever look around him in Londonderry? Only recently, they were celebrating the link across the river into Ebrington, the new square that will be available for the City of Culture, the vast amounts of money that have been spent on that, the plans for all the land behind it and the application for Fort George under INTERREG IVa.

Indeed, that is one application that I recently discussed with the Northern Ireland Science Park, which is keen to see that happen. Hopefully, all the information required will be produced to enable that to go ahead.

2.00 pm

The Member complains, but there are only two military sites in Londonderry that I know of — Fort George and Ebrington. Money is being spent on one and active consideration is being given to a grant application for an exciting science park on the other. What more does he want? Does he just want an opportunity to girm? That seems to be what this is all about. If he is going to pick a target to have a go at, he should at least pick one with some substance to it. There is no substance to those that he has chosen.

The Member went on to say that we have wasted opportunities in reskilling workers. As in the answer I gave to Mr McLaughlin, we already demand the reskilling of workers in public sector contracts. We include apprenticeship clauses and clauses to ensure the employment of long-term unemployed people in order to give them opportunities to gain skills. The Employment and Learning Minister, in the final act of budgetary allocations last year, got £12.7 million purely for the Steps to Work programme. He is now working on a document that he will bring to the Executive to try to get funding for young unemployed people so that we can do what we have to do to get those people into work. He and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment have already been successful in so far as this is the only region in the United Kingdom, as far as I know, where youth unemployment has fallen over the past year. There is nothing to the Member's allegations.

The Member then said — I loved this one — that the Finance Minister is against any devolution of taxes, yet the First Minister and deputy First Minister were discussing the devolution of corporation tax. — *[Interruption.]*

Well, first, I have made my position clear in the Assembly time and again. It is the same as that in the Programme for Government, which is that if we are going to devolve corporation tax, it must be devolved at a price that is affordable. However, having said that we are slow in looking for the devolution of taxes and that we should be more like Scotland, his final sally against us was that we had not reached the state of maturity where we could handle the devolution of any taxes. The Member should make his mind up.

I know that I have digressed, and I will come back to the point now, Mr Deputy Speaker. I only make these points to show that if the SDLP wishes to paint itself as the party of opposition in government, which appears to be the role that it wants, it should have some credibility to its opposition. Let us not have this contradiction and picking of targets that are not targets at all. Let us have some recognition that, as Mr McLaughlin said, there will be imperfections but we live in an imperfect world. We are not always going to get it right, and we are going to live within constraints. At least that may

be a more realistic approach than the one that the SDLP has adopted.

Having had that general moan, I have talked myself into gloominess through listening to that crowd. I thank Members for their contributions, even the ones who made the contributions that I had to barge them about. This is the Final Stage in a long process that began with the Budget 2011-15, and will be followed by the Main Estimates in June. There will be three monitoring rounds for this legislative phase of 2011-12, and then the review of final processes that the House debated on 13 February. We will seek to streamline the process, and I look forward to how that unfolds in the future.

We are near the end of the first year of what has been a challenging Budget. I think we have worked our way through it in a commendable manner, and I look forward to the same performance in the following year. I, therefore, commend the 2012 Budget Bill to Members.

Mr Deputy Speaker: We will move to a brighter note — the vote. Before we proceed to the Question, I remind Members that, as this is a Budget Bill, cross-community support is required.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That the Budget Bill [NIA 4/11-15] do now pass.

Private Members' Business

Decade of Centenaries

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

Mr Lyttle: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the number of centenaries of significant historic events affecting the UK and Ireland in the next 10 years; calls on the Executive to ensure that these are marked in an inclusive manner; and further calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to work together, with the British and Irish Governments, to develop a co-ordinated approach to the commemoration of these important events in our shared history.

I welcome the opportunity to propose the motion on the forthcoming decade of centenaries. I thank the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the junior Minister from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their presence in the House today. I recognise that a fair amount of preparatory work has already commenced on a number of key events. The decade will mark the centenary of a number of seminal events in the history of the UK and Ireland.

The period could be said to commence with the signing of the Ulster Covenant in 1912 through to the home rule era, which covers the period of the First World War, from 1914 to 1918, including the battle of the Somme and the Easter Rising in 1916, and culminating in the war of independence, the Government of Ireland Act 1920 and partition between 1919 and 1922.

During that period, we also had an event of huge importance to my constituency — the construction and tragic sinking of the Titanic in 1912. I commend the Executive and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for the work that has gone in to celebrating and commemorating the event and all the connected work at the Titanic Quarter, including the innovative, recently established Dock Church, which, I understand, is set to feature on 'Songs of Praise'.

This decade also saw a Gaelic revival and the rise of the women's suffrage movement and the labour movement, out of which came universal male and limited women's suffrage in 1918. It was a pivotal moment in our democratic history and a development that must be given central place in any decade of commemoration.

The era also saw the formation of the Irish Citizen Army, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and the Irish Volunteer Force (IVF). Therefore, the period presents a unique opportunity to commemorate and to explore historic events that shape our present in a profound manner, and it presents a challenge to ensure that it is done in a shared and inclusive way, maximising social and economic benefit for our community.

The challenge is whether we can explore that past together in a way that aids understanding through education and

discussion in order to learn from our past and to help us to inform the possibility of a shared and better future. Should we fail in that challenge, there is potential for a divisive period rather than one that is focused on future progress. The degree of maturity displayed over the coming 10 years in how we look at the past will shape how we live in the future.

From the Alliance Party's perspective, it is important that people have the opportunity to engage with aspects of our history with which they would not traditionally associate themselves and to consider alternative perspectives on those events so that no single narrative crowds out all other opinions. Therefore, it is important that both Governments are also involved in marking events throughout this period, and not just in aspects that are of most relevance to their own jurisdiction. Both Governments need to be involved, as both Governments were heavily involved in the original events.

Mr Humphrey: I do not disagree with the Member that Governments need to be involved, but does he agree that when Governments set up advisory groups, those groups should be representative and reflective of society in Northern Ireland and should not be made up of hand-picked people and have predetermined outcomes?

Mr Lyttle: I certainly agree that we should approach these events and commemorations in an inclusive manner. I believe that that is what the Member was asking, and the Alliance Party certainly supports that approach.

The transformative power of respectful commemoration based on inclusion and diversity is reflected in the guidance notes developed by the Community Relations Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund for the period, entitled 'Remembering the Future'. They have stated that the way in which these and other events are marked in public, as opposed to private space, will chart the progress that this society is making on its journey out of conflict. The anniversaries need not be mutually exclusive. Indeed, if the commemorations are handled sensitively, they will provide an opportunity to underline how much of our history is shared.

We should, however, be aware that for many people these events are, perhaps, as irrelevant to them as this House is. We should look at this as an opportunity to connect with people on important historic events that mean a great deal to many people, in a way that crafts an inclusive citizenship for Northern Ireland.

The Council of Europe White Paper on intercultural dialogue argues that civic participation and dialogue are vital elements to any healthy democracy. That can allow us to deal with different perspectives constructively and seek a basis for a more shared citizenship. Working with the British and Irish Governments, along with the Assembly, local councils and other interested groups, all of which are already planning for the upcoming period to varying degrees, can set the tone for how events are marked and ensure that certain principles apply. Those principles include placing events in an inclusive and shared framework and looking to the wider history and context of the time in these islands and across Europe, rather than allowing celebrations to be fragmented by marking individual centenaries.

Belfast City Council has laid down a useful benchmark for collaborative working on the issue, through establishing the commemorations and memorabilia working group. Rather than focusing on individual events, that cross-party group

has framed a programme divided into three chronological periods. The first, 'Shared History, Differing Allegiances' covers 1912-14; the second, which covers 1914-18, includes World War I, the battle of the Somme and the Easter Rising; and the third will cover the events surrounding the partition of Ireland. It is that type of thoughtful approach to the civic commemoration of those events that is a good example of cross-party working. The Alliance Party believes that other work can be based on that.

The highly successful state visit of the Queen to Ireland, hosted by former President Mary McAleese, was another fantastic example of how a co-ordinated approach can produce positive results for community relations. The visit made a tangible contribution to cohesion, sharing and integration throughout these islands, and the success of that historic visit teaches us important lessons about how to maximise the benefit of unique opportunities.

Such events are not spontaneous. They require a mix of detailed planning, careful management, sensitive choreography and, perhaps most importantly, strong political leadership. As such, I call on the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the Culture Minister, the Enterprise Minister and the Executive to work together with the British and Irish Governments to develop a co-ordinated approach to the commemoration of the upcoming centenaries, all of which represent important events in our shared history.

As the Enterprise Minister well knows, Northern Ireland is becoming an exceptional tourist destination, boosted significantly by a number of key international events, including the MTV Europe Music Awards and what I think is an excellent advertising campaign, NI 2012: Our Time, Our Place. It is great to see local acts and produce involved in that advertising campaign.

As mentioned earlier, I am delighted that my constituency, East Belfast, will have the new Titanic visitors' centre, which is due to open in April. We want to invite international guests to join us in commemorating all the events in a shared manner.

We in the Assembly must play our role in this important period, in partnership with wider society. The co-ordination of commemoration activity throughout these islands and close collaboration between tourist boards, the arts sector, business and civil society can help us to maximise the benefits of the coming period and to contribute to a legacy of social and economic growth for the region.

These events present us with a unique opportunity to commemorate centenaries that are important to many people in a way that delivers a transition to a new era of a shared society, where the focus shifts increasingly towards healing divisions, building cohesion and integration and addressing our joint economic challenges. In our opinion, that will require a united approach, and I hope the Assembly takes the opportunity to demonstrate such unity of purpose by fully supporting the motion.

2.15 pm

Mr Moutray: As the motion reminds us, we are on the cusp of a hugely significant decade of centenaries. Already, there has been much talk, debate and discussion about the various events. Some lists of events are longer than others and some seem to include events of much less significance

than others. Perhaps that is an effort to maintain some sort of balance. However, there is no doubt that the events that occurred between 1912 and 1922 in Britain and Ireland are among the most significant and pivotal in the modern history of these islands.

The motion seeks to place the key events relating to Ulster in the broader context of the UK and Ireland and, by doing so, the proposers are developing a theme raised by their MP Naomi Long, in a short debate on "Centenaries (UK and Ireland)" in Westminster Hall back in December 2011. I see some merit in that broader approach. Many of the key centenaries will require very careful handling if we are to secure the right outcome. We need to involve our national Parliament at Westminster. The events we are talking about have shaped the nature and direction of the subsequent history of these islands in a way that those who lived through them would probably never have contemplated. Importantly, as we know, they continue to shape and mould us today. The issues surrounding those centenaries remain very potent and powerful, exciting strong passions and views. They are a bit like nuclear energy: they have the potential either to deliver a positive and constructive outcome or a negative and destructive one.

Apart from the Commons debate to which I referred, I read what the former Taoiseach Brian Cowen had to say in his speech of May 2010, entitled "A Decade of Commemorations: Commemorating Our Shared History" and the Community Relations Council's report on marking anniversaries. I find much in those that I agree with. We want to ensure that we remember our past sensitively and rationally, and in a way that can command maximum cross-community support. There have been encouraging signs, only this weekend, from some within the House.

Her Majesty's visit to the Irish Republic last year was a huge success, and I welcome last week's statement by Danny Murphy of the GAA that the GAA will attend any centenary event to which it is invited. That is a significant step in the right direction and it contrasts sharply with the absence of all but one of the Ulster GAA counties when Her Majesty was at Croke Park. Perhaps, slowly but surely, we are making some progress. I also welcome the very belated moves in the Irish Republic towards recognising the contribution of Irish soldiers who fought for the cause of freedom and democracy in two world wars. That will greatly help in relation to the centenaries of the outbreak of war in 1914 and of the battle of the Somme in 1916.

As a member of the Enterprise, Trade and Industry Committee, I am very aware of the great interest that tourists have in our past. Centenaries offer tremendous tourism potential and we must tap into all that. The first centenary is coming very soon and, like many of those that will follow, has great potential to unite us all. The Titanic, which sank on the night of 14 April 1912, holds the entire world captive to this day. The extent of the Titanic legend is truly amazing and we are looking forward to the opening of the new Titanic visitors' centre in Belfast. However, I echo the words of Billy Kennedy in the 'News Letter', who said that we must never give the impression of celebration when it comes to the Titanic, for it is a story of great human tragedy that needs to be told sensitively and compassionately.

As to other centenaries, we will undoubtedly have differing opinions. However, I am all for good neighbourliness and am

happy to see peace and reconciliation between unionists and nationalists, North and South, in the UK and Ireland. However, just as my forefathers stoutly upheld their right of self-determination and resisted home rule, so am I determined that, when we come to 2021, we will not only mark the centenary of Northern Ireland but look forward with great confidence to its next hundred years.

We need to embark on the marking of centenaries on a realistic basis, and the historic wounds of our two communities are still very much felt. Every year, as the Twelfth of July comes round, there are those who attack and ridicule the faith, culture and history of the Protestant unionist people, and condemn us as sectarian bigots. That hardly fills me with confidence. When I see that every year, how am I —

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

Mr Moutray: When I see that every year, how does it engender confidence for moving forward and for the future?

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion and thank our Alliance colleagues for providing us with this opportunity, which is, and which should be seen as, the start of a process.

There are many issues to be addressed in this decade of centenary commemorations. Clearly, if we decide on that approach, those issues have the enormous potential to create further division and tension in our community. However, if the intention is, in fact, to promote greater understanding, that need not be the outcome. So, we should see all these anniversaries in that context.

The centenary of the signing of the Ulster Covenant next year is an opportunity. It is one of the early commemorations, but there are other issues —

Mr Humphrey: The covenant was signed 100 years ago this year.

Mr McLaughlin: That demonstrates my point: we have a lot to learn about each other. My understanding is that the covenant was signed on 28 September 1912. Is that correct? That is the date that I had in my mind.

Mr Humphrey: Yes.

Mr McLaughlin: The point, therefore, is that we would learn from each other, and we should. Perhaps the hard words that we normally heard and their noise and clamour happened because people did not have the confidence that what they had to say would be heard or understood. We all have a responsibility, not just for the past but for taking this opportunity. In my view, that is a responsibility.

I want to make it clear on behalf of my party that we will participate in many of these events, including those that reflect the unionist tradition, and that we will do that as far as is possible for us. We should engage at leadership level in the Executive and in both Governments — the Irish Government and the British Government — to ensure that there is an opportunity to learn about each other's past, the reasons for the decisions that people in those contemporary circumstances made and any outworking that is relevant to the times that we live in.

We are in a different place as a community. However, we can see from the peace walls how difficult it is for people to

move past that. It is tremendously difficult. There is no point in people making glib accusations. In the most constructive way that I can, I will say to our Alliance colleagues that talking about the cost of division is only a commentary and that we need a practical example of how we can start to break down those divisions.

This period of centenary anniversaries covers an extended time, including a number of Assembly terms. Through the discussions that we could have in that time, we could do a tremendous job of work in peace and reconciliation, to use that expression, to give greater understanding and to demonstrate that people can work together to tease out these issues, understand them and learn from each other. I also think that we have a bit of un-learning to do of the perceptions that have guided us in our lives thus far.

Let me put that commitment on the table. My party has already established a working group. We want to engage positively with every single political and cultural expression in this region, and we want to see a discussion that encompasses not just the island of Ireland but the island of Britain.

To round this off, in my opinion, the royal visit to the Twenty-six Counties was a very positive development. It affected me tremendously how effectively that was brought forward, despite my worries that it was perhaps premature. The generosity of spirit of people who attended those events and of the leaders — the Queen and the President of Ireland — made a tremendous contribution to the search for a more settled and peaceful society on the island of Ireland. They addressed our historical differences, as well as those issues where we can mutually benefit from understanding each other's position.

So, let us move forward and take those opportunities. In fact, let us seize those opportunities to demonstrate that we can hear each other when we are speaking and we do not have to shout to be heard.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As Question Time begins at 2.30 pm, I suggest that the House takes its ease until then. The debate will continue after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Mr Robin Swann.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Oral Answers to Questions

Employment and Learning

Mr Speaker: Question 2 has been withdrawn and requires a written answer.

Youth Unemployment

1. **Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline his plans to tackle youth unemployment. (AQO 1387/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): Youth unemployment brings its own challenges. Young people risk being denied the opportunity to apply their recently acquired skills. A particular problem faced by young people is having insufficient experience to compete for job vacancies, and it is difficult to get such experience without having a job. There is a danger that young people will be lost to long-term unemployment. Any lost generation would pose a major threat to the future development of our economy.

As I said at my previous Question Time, I have proposed to the Executive an additional range of measures designed to help to tackle youth unemployment. Executive colleagues raised some points of detail, which I am addressing. When the Executive have agreed the package of measures, I will make a full statement on the proposals to the Assembly.

I believe that the package that I have proposed will make a significant contribution to linking social and economic policy by building the skills base of our unemployed young people to prepare them for the jobs that will rebuild and rebalance the economy.

Mr B McCrea: Minister, on 8 June 2011 in Committee, you stated:

"We recognise that the Committee has an important role to play not just in scrutinising what the Department is doing but also as a partner in the development of policy."

Can you explain to the House why you have not brought those issues to the Committee for discussion? Can you tell us whether the proposals that you have shared with Executive colleagues are going to be a rehash of what is going on in the rest of the United Kingdom or whether you have some innovative thinking to bring to the matter?

Dr Farry: Mr McCrea raised a couple of questions, and I will try to address both of them.

If the Chair of the Committee for Employment and Learning wants to invite my officials to brief the Committee on this important matter, I am more than happy to make them available. The Committee has asked for a whole host of briefings on matters small and, occasionally, on matters large. Certainly, on this large matter, I would welcome the Committee having a discussion. Of course, the Committee will appreciate that it is for the Executive to determine the

policy in the first instance. That is where agreement has to be found, as an Executive matter. After that we look to the Finance Minister for resources.

Secondly, although we are mindful of policies being developed in the rest of the United Kingdom, we are a devolved region and do not slavishly follow what happens in other jurisdictions. However, we will take on board the lessons from what is working in the rest of the UK. I am keen to add a premium of additionality that is linked to our economy. My proposals are very much linked to the priority skills areas that we have in Northern Ireland. This is not simply about dealing with unemployment, it is about an investment in the future of our economy by ensuring that we invest in the right areas in which growth is going to be highest in the years to come.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Has the Minister's Department carried out any assessment of the number of young people who have emigrated, particularly from rural areas, in search of work? Does the Department have a strategy for tackling youth unemployment in rural areas?

Dr Farry: I am aware of the issues that Mr McElduff raises. It is difficult to give a precise figure for emigration. The Northern Ireland Executive are not responsible for monitoring those issues, but we are aware of them anecdotally. I am mindful of making sure that a full suite of policies is in place across Northern Ireland, for urban and rural areas. Mr McElduff will be aware, for example, that we rolled out the Local Employment Intermediary Service — LEMIS — project in areas such as Cookstown and Moyle recently, so we recognise the fact that there are pockets of disadvantage in some rural areas in which we need to make some very particular interventions.

Mr Eastwood: What progress has been made in creating a tracking system for NEET young people?

Dr Farry: Youth unemployment is an aspect of the NEETs issue. In some respects, the paper that I am putting forward will try to set out some measures to deal with that. Ultimately, we are working towards a NEETs strategy, which I intend to bring to the Executive around April. It is more than simply a response from my Department; it will have to be a cross-departmental initiative involving a number of Departments, including the Departments of Health and Education in particular. So, we are working towards that objective, and I am very conscious that I have the support of my ministerial colleagues in ensuring that we bring this important piece of work to fruition very soon.

Mr Speaker: Question 2 has been withdrawn.

DEL: Dissolution

3. **Mr Cree** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what discussions he has had with the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in relation to preparations for the dissolution of his Department. (AQO 1389/11-15)

Dr Farry: My conversations with the First Minister and deputy First Minister reflect my broader comments on the proposed dissolution of the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL). Personally, I believe that there should be a rationalisation of the number of Departments. That includes the creation of a Department of the economy. I think that we should approach the reduction of Departments

responsibly, making changes for the best reasons of policy coherence and effective service delivery, rather than political considerations. I do not believe that this can be achieved through examining one Department in isolation.

I have also been clear that all the functions exercised by my Department sit together and are fully integrated. This is based around a common agenda of skills, including the development of the skills of those coming into the labour market, through our further education colleges and universities; those who are in the workplace, through upskilling and reskilling; and those who are unemployed or economically inactive, to get and keep a job.

It is imperative that skills policy and skills delivery, through our providers, including further education and higher education, be in an economic Department. Furthermore, what we do in terms of skills is absolutely critical to the future development of our economy and we must ensure that we do not undermine our competitive cutting edge. It is, therefore, important that the functions of DEL be preserved together, either within a dedicated Department or a larger Department of the economy, where skills would interface with the other key drivers of economic transformation.

The First Minister and deputy First Minister announced that they will be consulting stakeholders on the future of the Department.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for his response. Is he concerned about the effect that these uncertainties are having on his staff and, as he has suggested, the staff in other Departments? Is it not time to get certainty on this matter.

Dr Farry: At present, my sole focus as Minister is on exercising the functions of my Department. I am not being deflected from that one bit. That also applies to my officials and staff. They are aware that they have a job to do in providing a service to the people of Northern Ireland. They are, equally, singularly focused on their responsibilities and on ensuring that they do not take their eyes off the ball.

Ultimately, departmental employees appreciate that they are employees of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, and that will be recognised in the future. Great efforts have been made by my permanent secretary and me to explain to departmental staff what is happening and to reassure them regarding their futures.

Mr Campbell: There appear to be problems afflicting Alliance Departments. To be fair to this Alliance Minister, they are not of his making. Will he outline to the House, and to the wider Northern Ireland public, any preliminary discussions that he has had with his Executive colleagues in preparation for what he now knows is inevitably ahead?

Dr Farry: First, both Alliance Ministers are doing the jobs asked of them by the Northern Ireland electorate and the Members of the House. Neither of us is being deflected from our actions. Secondly, as the Member is aware, discussions between Ministers are confidential, and it would not be appropriate for me to refer to them on the Floor of the House.

Mr G Kelly: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Does the Minister accept that there is a very strong argument for aligning further education with the Department of Education, and that that is the strongest place for it to be? Also, it

would not become the poor relation, which is something I think you referred to earlier.

Dr Farry: I thank the Mr Kelly for his question. At present, there is a major interface between my Department and the Department of Education, and it is mostly in service delivery and regulatory matters. As much as we are resolving those issues perfectly well today, that will always be the case no matter what arrangements come to pass.

The most compelling thing that I am aware of, and that I am sure all Members and those who work in the FE and higher education sectors are aware of, is the importance of the links between FE and HE and the business sector, particularly regarding the identification of businesses' particular skills needs and ensuring that the research and development that occurs in the FE or higher education sector is relevant to the needs of business and that we have effective knowledge transfer.

The most important interface in moving Northern Ireland forward is to ensure that what happens in further education and higher education is linked to the economy and that all the drivers of the economy relate properly to one another and are not fragmented. To do otherwise, I fear, would run the risk of undermining what we are doing in Northern Ireland. Skills are the most important offering that we have to attract inward investment and enable local companies to grow. If we send out a negative message about what we are doing on skills, we will set back the very important initiatives that the Executive have taken forward in relation to the economy, in particular through the economic strategy.

Mr Allister: Given that expediency rather than strategy attended the announcement of the dissolution of DEL, has the Minister any confidence that the same expediency will not attend the distribution of its functions in a carve-up between a DUP Department and a Sinn Féin Department, rather than a strategic vision such as he has given of a Department for the economy? When does he expect it to happen?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Allister for his question. He will be aware, as the House will be aware, that the First Minister and the deputy First Minister have announced that they intend to take the views of a number of key stakeholders in Northern Ireland society. My Department, alongside other Departments, has been asked to make suggestions as to who they should take views from. Equally, the Committee for Employment and Learning is engaging in its own exercise. I expect that, before any decision is made on the future of the Department and before any distribution of the Department's functions, proper and due consideration will be given to those views. Members will already be very clear that a large number of organisations have expressed a desire to see economic coherence in how we move forward.

DEL: Programme for Government and Economic Strategy

4. **Mr Dickson** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what role his Department has had in informing the draft Programme for Government and the draft economic strategy. (AQO 1390/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department has engaged fully in the development of the draft economic strategy and the draft Programme

for Government. Through my role in the Executive, I have played an active part in the development of the Programme for Government. I am also a member of the Executive subcommittee on the economy, which oversaw the drafting of the economic strategy. At official level, the Department's permanent secretary sits on the economic strategy steering group, while the Department's senior economist is a member of the economic strategy working group. I am pleased that the strategy recognises the central importance of skills, employment and innovation to our future economic success and the development of our society.

Mr Dickson: I thank the Minister for his answer. Minister, can you detail the importance of skills to meeting the Executive's aims of rebuilding the economy in the short term and rebalancing our economy in the long term?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his supplementary. He is right to identify the two different strands of activity that we are engaged with. One is the short-term rebuilding of our economy and ensuring that we deal with the current economic situation and maximise employment levels. Only today, I announced that we have reprioritised tourism as a priority skill area in reflection of the important opportunities for job creation in that area linked to events this year and in the future.

In a broader sense, skills are the key driver of our economy. We have too many people with low or no qualifications. On the other hand, my skills strategy identifies the need for a significant uplift in, and demand for, higher-level skills through to 2020. The Programme for Government, the economic strategy and my Department's internal documents all reflect those strategic objectives. We have a full suite of policies that are working to ensure that we can meet those objectives.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an bhfreagra a thug sé dúinn. I thank the Minister for the answers that he has given us. I suppose the question I have is whether the Minister believes that there is proper awareness at the Executive table of particular job retention problems facing rural communities, particularly in the construction and engineering sectors.

2.45 pm

Dr Farry: I am grateful to the Member for her question. I think that there is recognition of the need to ensure that we have a balanced approach to the future of Northern Ireland. The Member will appreciate that the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, who is a party colleague of hers, has particular responsibility in that regard. She gave her views to the economic subcommittee, and they are reflected in the strategy.

With regard to some of the more specific things that she mentioned, I said in response to her colleague that we have rolled out LEMIS to Cookstown and Moyle. We are also mindful of the need to retrain workers in other areas.

The Member also mentioned engineering. Representatives of employers have contacted me on that, and my officials are scoping the matter out to see whether we need to make some targeted interventions in support of the engineering sector in Northern Ireland, which, as the Member knows, is critical to the future of our economy.

Mrs Overend: Given that only four of the Executive's key commitments relate to his Department, is the Minister satisfied that enough account has been taken of the importance of DEL's functions in growing the economy?

Dr Farry: I thank Mrs Overend for her question. It is important that we focus on the quality, rather than the quantity, of the targets. Indeed, the Department of Health, which is a major spending Department, has only five or six targets.

I will draw attention to the nature of my targets in the Programme for Government and highlight two. One relates to the 200,000 qualifications that we are seeking to achieve at level 2 and above. That is a major target not just for my Department but for the Executive, and it is critical to upskilling the workforce in Northern Ireland. We also have the target of achieving 114,000 people going into work by 2015. That target raised a number of eyebrows, but I believe that we have to focus on it. Getting people into work is a central objective of my Department, and it must also be a central objective of the Executive and Assembly. It would certainly be strange not to have a target for that. My Department met a similar target in the previous Programme for Government, and it is important that we continue to push ourselves harder and faster in that regard. That target is critical to the coherence and credibility of the Programme for Government, and I am pleased that it is there.

Mrs D Kelly: Minister, do you have any assurances that your targets in the Programme for Government and the economic strategy will be retained once the Department is dissolved? Do you believe in the principle of participative democracy and, therefore, that the people should have a say in the future shape of the Department?

Dr Farry: I thank Mrs Kelly for her supplementary question. A lot of people seem to be writing off the Department. I stress that we have not gone away, you know. We are here, and we continue to function. We have a massive in tray of issues, and I am continuing to work my way through them all. The targets that the Member refers to are in the Programme for Government. It is the Executive's Programme for Government and the Executive's economic strategy. Those targets will remain, no matter what happens.

Universities Ireland

5. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the current priorities, focus and work programme of Universities Ireland. (AQO 1391/11-15)

Dr Farry: The role of Universities Ireland is to promote co-operation and collaboration among the nine universities on the island of Ireland and to enhance their reputations in Europe and overseas. Universities Ireland provides a unique service to the higher education sector in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and it enhances the reputations of the institutions in both jurisdictions. Its current priorities and activities focus on business sponsorship for North/South masters scholarships; student debates on current topics that are related to the island of Ireland; fellowships for young historians studying the 1912-1922 period; representing the island of Ireland's higher education sector through the Scholars at Risk international network, which provides support to academics who are at risk of persecution in their own countries; and supporting the Irish-African Partnership for Research Capacity Building. Work

is also planned with universities in Scotland to prepare a programme of joint activities, particularly in the area of research.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra. I thank the Minister for his answer. I notice that he did not mention the student flow from the North to the South, and vice versa. Does he share the concern that has been expressed in the Irish Business and Employers Confederation/Confederation of British Industry (IBEC/CBI) report, which identified that as a major area of concern? Can he outline what steps his Department is taking, particularly with regard to career advice, to try to increase the numbers?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr McCartney for his supplementary question. I should explain that the original question applies to Universities Ireland as an organisation. However, with regard to the wider issue that he identifies, I am certainly mindful of the IBEC/CBI report. My officials have been in touch with their counterparts in the Department of Education and Skills in Ireland. I also raised the issue with my counterpart, Ruairí Quinn, and we discussed the matter. I agree with the central conclusion that, with regard to student flows between the North and the South in both directions, that particular market is underdeveloped compared with flows in other directions across these islands. We are certainly looking at what we can do to ensure that there is a more level playing field, that students in all jurisdictions can make informed decisions about courses that are available and that qualifications in different jurisdictions are understood properly by receiving institutions in order to liberalise that flow of students.

Mr Nesbitt: In his answers, the Minister referenced Universities Ireland and universities in Scotland. Have we nothing to learn from universities in England and Wales?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Nesbitt for his question. Perhaps I am slightly strange in the Chamber because I actually try to answer the questions that are put to me and relate my answers to the jurisdictions that they refer to. Certainly, universities here operate in networks that are available throughout these islands and further afield. Obviously, they are not even just linked. The University of Ulster has developed its Confucius Institute. Therefore, it is now breaking out into China. *[Laughter.]* It overflowed England and Wales. There are links with all parts of these islands and further afield. Obviously, both universities are autonomous institutions. They are keen to develop their links with all other jurisdictions whether they be at home or further afield. We are concluding the higher education strategy. One of its key themes will be links beyond Northern Ireland — both domestic links and international links. So, I think that Mr Nesbitt will be encouraged by what he sees in due course.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra. Can the Minister provide clarification on whether, in fact, his Department has been in touch with other third-level institutions with regard to the dissolution of DEL?

Dr Farry: That question is a bit of a stretch. My Department deals with institutions and universities in Northern Ireland, of which there are three — the Open University being the third in case anyone is wondering. It is not my Department's responsibility to interact with universities in different jurisdictions directly. Universities will have their own bilateral relationships.

Mr Speaker: I warn Members that supplementary questions should relate to the original question. Some Members are stretching it.

Higher Education: Regional Colleges

6. **Mr McMullan** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps his Department is taking to ensure that regional colleges are able to deliver a higher percentage of higher education provision. (AQO 1392/11-15)

Dr Farry: I am fully committed to further education colleges delivering higher education courses. I believe that they are best placed to meet the higher technician and associate professional skills needs of employers through provision of intermediate higher level courses such as foundation degrees. To that end, targets have been set in the skills strategy, Success through Skills — Transforming Futures, to increase the number of learners who study foundation degrees by 25%.

At present, over 11,000 students take higher education courses in further education colleges on either a full-time or part-time basis. That represents 20% of the total number of higher education enrolments. The total number of funded full-time higher education places in colleges is 3,833. That figure represents a 15% increase since 2002. In December, I announced an additional 70 full-time higher education places for further education, the first tranche of which will be allocated in 2012-13. There are also around 7,000 part-time higher education enrolments in further education.

Mr McMullan: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does the Minister agree and accept that the financial challenges that people are facing today mean that more and more students, including mature students, would like the opportunity to undertake degree courses in their local towns for as long as possible before completing those courses at university? Does he agree that the further education colleges are well placed to deliver higher education provision when flexibility is required?

Mr Speaker: Before the Minister answers, Members have been elected since May 2011 and should know that supplementary questions should not be read out. That would not happen in any other place.

Dr Farry: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I will close my file just in case. *[Laughter.]*

I agree with the thrust of Mr McMullan's point, and I am keen to make it clear that further education provides an alternative route to higher education. In some cases, the options provided by further education may be more applicable to the needs of industry. It also allows people to sample higher education through a foundation degree and then decide whether they want to go on to a further level.

When I make the point about the need to upskill the workforce in Northern Ireland and to have a uniformly higher level of skills, I do not always mean that that has to be done through a higher education degree from a university. Foundation degrees and, potentially, level four apprenticeships — we hope to address those later this year — are also worthy options for people to consider. All are equally valid in the upskilling of the workforce.

Mr I McCrea: Does the Minister agree that the recent success of the South West College in receiving three awards at the Association of Colleges Beacon Awards is a good foundation for FE colleges in Northern Ireland? Does he agree that other colleges could learn from that?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr McCrea for his question. I visited the South West College's STEM centre in Dungannon last Wednesday, and I was pleased to acknowledge those awards. It is important to put the Beacon Awards in context. They are UK-wide awards that reflect the best in further education across these islands. The offerings in Dungannon should be an example to us all of how Northern Ireland is not simply following other parts of the UK but is right in the lead.

Mr Beggs: Rather than continuing to commit further funds to higher education courses at FE colleges, does the Minister accept that it is important to have accessible basic educational and vocational courses in the regional colleges? Can he give an update on the financial concerns that have arisen following the Northern Regional College's decision to review the future of the Larne campus?

Dr Farry: Again, there is a lot in those questions. We are working on the Larne issue and creating some temporary provision in that campus.

I want to stress the importance of FE across a broad spectrum, and it is not a case of picking or choosing one aspect over another. What happens in FE is relevant to business across a broad spectrum, and it is important that we continue to invest across that broad front. Overall, the FE budget has not been impacted as heavily as other parts of my Department's budget during the current CSR period, which is a reflection of its importance. We should invest further in that sector, and I welcome it continuing to flourish.

Mr McDevitt: Given the need to continue to develop better co-operation and greater integration between the work of the FE and university sectors, does the Minister agree that, whatever happens to his Department, the accountability for FE colleges and universities should be kept together and not split between two Departments?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr McDevitt for his question. This theme is becoming infectious, although I understand Members' concern that we have the right way forward. The accountability mechanisms for further education and higher education are separate. They are different types of bodies with different governance arrangements and different accounting processes.

The issue of the accountability strands is less significant for the future direction of travel than the interface with business, which is absolutely fundamental to the future development of our economy.

3.00 pm

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Unemployment

1. **Mr Byrne** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the latest published unemployment figures. (AQO 1402/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Although our rate of unemployment may be low compared with other European Union countries, there is still much work to be done to boost economic growth to the levels that can tackle unemployment here in Northern Ireland. I and my Executive colleagues are determined to steer our economy through challenging conditions. Using, for example, the Boosting Business initiative, the jobs fund and the Executive's economic strategy, we aim to rebuild and rebalance the economy. We also aim to improve employment prospects by making our economy stronger and more competitive.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for her answer. Does she have any proposals to tackle youth unemployment in particular? I should also mention that Strabane, in West Tyrone, has traditionally been very severely handicapped by unemployment.

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. Youth unemployment rates, as he will know, have risen across Europe and in all regions of the United Kingdom during the recession. Research has shown that youth unemployment here and across Europe is more sensitive to economic shocks. Statistics show that 8.1% of those aged under 25 in Northern Ireland are claiming unemployment benefits. As the Member will be aware, we have launched the Northern Ireland jobs fund, and some of the jobs that have been created by the jobs fund will help to deal with some of the youth unemployment.

Furthermore, the Minister for Employment and Learning has raised the specific issue of youth unemployment with Executive colleagues. He is currently working on proposals to put to the Executive in March to mitigate the higher rate of youth unemployment in Northern Ireland. We will keep that constantly under review. The Member will not be surprised to hear me say that that is a matter not just for my Department. It is a matter that we discuss regularly at the Executive, and, as I said, the Minister for Employment and Learning hopes to bring a paper that the Executive can approve in March.

Mr Campbell: Will the Minister outline her hopes and the prospects for the future in relation to youth unemployment, given the difficulties that the economy currently presents to young people? She will be in my constituency later in the week, and, hopefully, she will be able to refer to some of the issues that will lead to a downward spiral in the youth unemployment figure.

Mrs Foster: The important thing to remember is that, although the media reports on youth unemployment may lead us to believe that we have the highest rate in Europe, we are far from that. Keeping young people active in the labour market and providing meaningful employment opportunities is hugely important for us, because it allows us to realise our economic potential, look after the well-being of young people and, importantly, because it is sometimes forgotten, promote social cohesion. I look forward very much to visiting the Member's constituency later this week so that we can talk about the number of ongoing youth employment projects and those across the piece that are being promoted by Boosting Business. The jobs fund has a significant number of projects in the pipeline, about which I hope to make announcements in the near future.

Mr McCartney: Gabhaim buíochas leis a Aire. I thank the Minister for her answers. Mindful of the news over the weekend about pressure being put on a number of jobs in Fujitsu in Derry, what steps is the Minister taking to tackle the high rates of unemployment in Derry and Strabane?

Mrs Foster: I will take up the Member's point about Fujitsu. I understand that, as part of the normal course of business, the company undertakes regular reviews to ensure that resources match its service delivery contractual commitments. A review carried out by the company's applications support group has identified a possible — and it is only a possible — surplus of around 60 staff across all its locations, and the company has entered into a 30-day statutory consultation period with all applications support staff across all its locations in the UK and Ireland, as required by law.

Therefore, the site in Londonderry may not be affected at all, but we shall have to wait. Fujitsu works closely with the Executive, Invest Northern Ireland and local representatives, and we hope that the quality and value of work that is delivered for Fujitsu in Londonderry will bear through in those job announcements.

Mrs Overend: Will the Minister assure the House that her Department will take into consideration the latest unemployment figures when drawing up her final economic strategy? The draft strategy, which closed for responses last week, included a target of only promoting 25,000 jobs during the four-year period up to 2014-15.

Mrs Foster: The unemployment statistics form very much part of that economic strategy. The Member is right to point out that the consultation has now closed, and we will bring the final economic strategy to the Executive. I recall that, at the time of the launch of the draft economic strategy, there was some scepticism in and around the House about whether we could reach the target of 25,000 jobs. I said that we have to meet that target, and, indeed, I want to exceed it. As jobs are lost at one end, it is imperative that we continue to bring jobs into Northern Ireland and create jobs with local indigenous companies here. Our eyes are firmly set upon that.

Invest NI: Business Loans Scheme

2. **Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the progress of Invest NI's business loans scheme. (AQO 1403/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest Northern Ireland continues to work to introduce two new loan schemes that are designed to help to fill identified funding gaps for our local business base. Those are the growth loan fund and the small, medium and micro-enterprises (SMME) loan fund. The contract for fund management services for the growth loan fund was awarded on Friday 17 February 2012, and, subject to the successful completion of contract negotiations and security clearance, it is anticipated that the growth loan fund will be operational by the end of March 2012. The Invest Northern Ireland board has also approved the development of a £5 million SMME loan fund. The fund will be managed on a commercial basis by an FSA-approved fund manager, who will be appointed following an open procurement process. A tender for that contract is currently being prepared, and it is anticipated that the fund will be operational by July 2012.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for her response. What will be the range of the scale of loans for individual applicants to the small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) growth loan fund, and what level of anticipated benefits does she see for the economy?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. Those loan funds have been developed by Invest Northern Ireland in conjunction with the Department to fill a gap that has been identified by a lot of our businesses in relation to the difficulties that they are experiencing in accessing finance. It is a familiar theme in the House that the biggest problem for our businesses in sustaining themselves and in wanting to grow is in relation to access to finance and the fact that the banks are not lending and are being quite difficult with some of our very good small and medium-sized enterprises. The growth loan fund will provide £50 million, primarily as unsecured loans, to viable growth businesses. It will be for businesses that are in growth mode in the manufacturing and tradable services sectors over the next five years. Typically, the loans will range between £50,000 and £500,000, and they will be negotiated on a fully commercial basis.

I came across that when I visited a firm with Mr Dunne and Mr Weir in north Down some time ago. It was a company that wanted to expand and had identified premises. It went to the bank, which said that it could lend money as long as the company brought a 40% deposit. That meant that the company could not expand, and the growth loan fund is there to help the sorts of businesses that want to and have the wherewithal to expand but are being prevented from doing so by banks that are not looking at the wider picture.

Mrs Dobson: Can the Minister outline the criteria for application to the £50 million loan fund that is contained in the draft Programme for Government (PFG), given that it will support a limited number of SMEs, 150 in total, between now and 2015?

Mrs Foster: Each of those loans will be negotiated individually, and that is why we had to appoint a fund manager to look at each individual application. That person will then set the interest rates for each of those applications. The growth loan fund is there for the range of £50,000 to £500,000, but we felt that there was a need to go lower than that with the SMME loan fund — we should really find a snappier way of saying that. The SMME loan fund will provide a further £5 million of unsecured loans for start-up businesses and small micro-businesses, and those loans will range typically from £1,000 to £50,000. So, that is a smaller amount of money. However, in my experience at constituency level, we need to get down to that level to help our small and micro-sized businesses.

Dr McDonnell: I appreciate the Minister's comments on the difficulty with the banks. Will she give us an assessment or update on any discussions that she or her Department may have had on the number and proportion of cases where local banks have been the main creditor and have pushed local small companies into difficulties, ending up with administration or, indeed, individual voluntary agreements to try to stay alive? In other words, what proportion of businesses have been put into difficulties by banks, as distinct from those that have gone into difficulties through natural process?

Mrs Foster: It is difficult to take out those figures. However, I am sure that, when many Members around this House have looked at their constituency appointments over the past six months, they will have noticed that the amount of small businesses that have been coming to talk to us about access to finance has really grown over that time.

Bank lending is led by my colleague the Minister of Finance and Personnel, and I know that he has had many meetings with banks. However, he made a comment last week which was very important: it is not just the banks that are putting pressure on companies. Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) is also putting a lot of pressure on companies. Indeed, I had a conversation with the Minister of Finance and Personnel to see if there is something that we in the Government can do to help some of those companies that are put under tremendous pressure by HMRC. They have been told that, if they do not pay within a certain time, very viable companies will be closed down. We will continue to explore that with the Minister of Finance and Personnel.

Hydraulic Fracturing: North Coast

3. **Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the impact that hydraulic fracturing could have on tourism in the north coast if it were to be permitted. (AQO 1404/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Petroleum licences have been issued to two companies near the north coast; namely, Rathlin Energy and P R Singleton Ltd, neither of which has expressed any intention to carry out hydraulic fracturing. Exploration in that area is focused on conventional hydrocarbon targets, which can be developed without fracking should oil or gas be found. If exploration reveals a zone of shale prospective for gas that results in a proposal for hydraulic fracturing, that will be subject to the full rigour of the planning and environmental impact assessment processes, within which the tourism implications will be fully addressed through comprehensive consultation.

Mr McMullan: I thank the Minister for her answer. Will the Minister agree that, given the public information that is freely available out there, there is a danger to tourism because of fracking? Will she assure me that the major tourism stakeholders will be consulted before any input into the decision process on fracking? Also, will she agree that the other form of alternative energy is geothermal, especially around the Ballycastle area, and that her Department has, to date, shamelessly let that go?

Mrs Foster: I have already indicated that there are no plans in place for hydraulic fracturing in the north Antrim area. Neither Rathlin Energy nor P R Singleton has indicated that it intends to use hydraulic fracturing.

I was in Qatar last week, which provides 80% of gas to the United Kingdom; that is the same state that is hosting the 2022 World Cup. It does not seem to have done any damage to its tourism infrastructure. Indeed, it is bidding for the 2020 Olympics.

3.15 pm

Gas production can bring huge benefits to a particular part of the world. Therefore my answer to the first of the Member's many questions about whether fracturing

damages tourism is: not if it is carried out in a way that will comply with planning permissions and environmental impact assessments. I do not see a direct link between tourism and hydraulic fracturing. In certain parts of our country disgraceful stories have been put out, instead of looking at the facts. We are at a stage where a planning application and an environmental impact assessment need to be put in place. People would do well to wait until those are in place before hyping up and getting excited.

Mr Frew: I thank the Minister for reminding us all about the position on hydraulic fracturing and the exploration of gas. Will the Minister explain to the House what it will mean to Northern Ireland if there is gas to be explored and whether it will be viable to do so?

Mrs Foster: The work that has been taken on by the particular company — a company that has met both the Minister of the Environment and me — is to see whether it is feasible to take shale gas out of the Lough Allen basin and in and around Fermanagh. That work is ongoing. The company will carry out more work and then make a planning application and a strategic environmental impact assessment to see whether it can take shale gas out of County Fermanagh in a safe way that respects the environment and respects what happens in County Fermanagh.

I find it offensive for people to say that I would in some way damage County Fermanagh. As if. If anything like that happens in County Fermanagh, it will be done in a way that is environmentally friendly and which will bring much needed jobs to the county. That is where my eye is firmly fixed. It is just a pity that other representatives from the county do not have their eyes fixed firmly on that opportunity.

Mr Nesbitt: Will the Minister confirm whether 70% of the land mass of Northern Ireland is currently under licence for exploration?

Mrs Foster: No.

Ms Lo: I want to come back to the Minister's response. She disputed the link between fracking and tourism. Minister, do you agree that we have a beautiful countryside with a rich natural habitat for wildlife, which is a main attraction for tourists?

Mrs Foster: Yes, I do —

Ms Lo: Sorry, Minister, and that fracking could disrupt our natural environment?

Mrs Foster: Yes to the first question; and, in response to the second, that is why we have processes in place — processes that are not replicated in America. I have been sent many examples of what has happened in various states across America, but, frankly, we have very stringent regulations here in Northern Ireland, and I would not have it any other way.

Creative Industries

4. **Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action she is taking to support creative industries. (AQO 1405/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI prioritises those subsectors in the creative industries that offer the greatest potential for

growth through driving a shift to higher value-added and productivity levels, namely, software, film and television, digital content and music. Over the past three years, total Invest NI direct and indirect support to those subsectors of the creative industries was approximately £58 million.

Invest NI also assists the creative industries sector through its support for sectorally focused external delivery organisations. For example, Invest NI's support to Northern Ireland Screen has resulted in a number of substantial economic benefits for Northern Ireland, including the attraction of over 50 internationally mobile film and television investment projects, such as 'Game of Thrones', 'Your Highness' and 'City of Ember'. More recently, 'The Shore', a short film by Northern Ireland screenwriter, producer and director Terry George, was successful in winning the Oscar for best live action short film at last night's ceremony in Los Angeles. We heartily congratulate Terry George and all his team.

Invest NI is the largest single funder of Northern Ireland Screen, providing support of £35.5 million in the period 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2012. Invest NI has also provided support towards the activities of other sectoral bodies that seek to develop the creative industries, including Digital Circle, which works across the digital media sector, and Craft NI, which supports the development of the craft sector.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for her answer. Given the importance of the creative industries and the recent success at the Oscars of Terry George and 'The Shore', will the Minister explain why there was no mention of the screen industries or Northern Ireland Screen in the draft economic strategy?

Mrs Foster: I think the Member will find it in the Programme for Government. I hope he is not suggesting that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) are not fully behind the absolutely marvellous economic benefit that we have derived from programmes such as 'Your Highness' and 'Game of Thrones'. Not a Question Time goes by when the First Minister or deputy First Minister do not make reference to the film industry in Northern Ireland, and I have been with them on many occasions when they have made reference to the marvellous investment that has been made in these industries.

I think it is wrong to suggest in any way that we do not value the creative industries. I spend a considerable amount of time — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Minister to answer.

Mrs Foster: There is a lot of noise coming from certain sections of this Assembly today.

DETI is currently developing a collaborative framework with DCAL in relation to the creative industries, and that framework will set out clear roles and responsibilities for the key organisations. I accept that this may have been fragmented in the past, but we are changing that. A framework is under way, and we look forward to bringing that before the House.

Mr Speaker: Members need to rise in their place.

Miss M McIlveen: As the Minister mentioned, Northern Ireland experienced success at last night's Oscars with Terry George's 'The Shore', however, when trying to attract television drama productions, it is recognised that Northern Ireland is at a competitive disadvantage, particularly with regard to tax incentives. What are the Minister and her Department doing to try to address that?

Mrs Foster: The Member makes a very good point. Invest NI is working with Northern Ireland Screen and other stakeholders across the United Kingdom to try to secure television tax credit similar to that currently in place for film production. In trying to attract high-value television drama productions, we, like the rest of the United Kingdom, are at a competitive disadvantage to other regions such as the Republic of Ireland, which has utilised tax incentives to secure a number of key television series such as 'The Tudors' and 'Camelot'. It is important that we push on in relation to the tax incentive issue, but the matter is not just one for Northern Ireland, it should be addressed right across the United Kingdom.

Mrs McKeivitt: Will the Minister provide an update on discussions that her Department has had in relation to the location of a digital hub in the Belfast area?

Mrs Foster: Those discussions are continuing. I had some very good discussions in relation to Digital Circle when I was in Londonderry recently. The work that is going on there is leading the way, and I look forward to having similar discussions in Belfast, which I have not had to date, to be honest with the Member. However, Londonderry has made tremendous strides in relation to the digital work that is going on there, particularly in digital media. It should lead the way, particularly as the United Kingdom City of Culture title will be coming there in 2013.

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs): South Antrim

5. **Ms Lewis** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how Invest NI has been helping small and medium-sized enterprises in South Antrim since May 2011. (AQO 1406/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest Northern Ireland continues to work closely with small and medium-sized companies across South Antrim and has supported the development plans of several locally owned businesses including Texthelp, Team Solutions and Pneutrol Ireland since May 2011.

Over the past nine months, we implemented a range of initiatives, such as Boosting Business and the £19 million jobs fund, to help businesses to cope with the impact of the downturn and to create new employment opportunities. In south Antrim, six jobs fund projects are under negotiation, with the potential to create almost 50 new jobs. In addition, the jobs fund has offered support for five young people to set up their own business and has supported a number of social enterprises across the constituency to create a further 25 new jobs.

Ms Lewis: I thank the Minister for her answer, which is very much welcome. The Minister is obviously aware that, in many cases, high street traders, especially in small and medium-sized communities such as the one that I represent, are struggling with the economic climate. Can the Minister inform me how

her Department has been assisting those businesses, and what mechanisms of support are open to them?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for her supplementary question. The Member mentioned the high street in particular. Although Invest Northern Ireland does not engage directly with the retail sector, we acknowledge the retail sector's importance to the local economy. A retail initiative, which was developed by Invest Northern Ireland, has run successfully in two council areas — Larne and Ballymena. It has been delivered in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce, the traders' forum, the University of Ulster, the sector skills councils and Business in the Community. It has been a success, and we are looking at whether we can run something like that in the rest of the south Antrim area.

Again, it points to the importance of working with local partners, particularly for microbusinesses, because, often those very small businesses look first to local government for assistance, and the local economic development projects that have come up from many of our local councils are based on helping small businesses. The Fermanagh example of Survive and Thrive is a very good programme, and I have seen many of those programmes right across Northern Ireland. So, it is about working in partnership with our local delivery agents and with the Chamber of Commerce across Northern Ireland and trying to deliver very specialised local solutions for what are, in many cases, very localised problems.

Mr Kinahan: Has the Minister had discussions with the Environment Minister about giving councils, such as Antrim Borough Council, more power in the future through the review of public administration (RPA) to help small and medium-sized businesses?

Mrs Foster: Part of the RPA proposals include part of my Department being devolved to local councils to deal with local economic development. However, I will say to the Member again that it is about partnership working between local councils and Departments here at Stormont. It is not about who has the power; it is about who has the willingness to look for a solution to the problems in their particular area. I have seen that working very well in a number of councils, whether it is Ballymena or Craigavon, which I have been to on a number of occasions. There is a real willingness there to look for a local solution. That is done through the LED programme, which is administered by DETI, and I call on all Members to look for local solutions in their local areas, to put in an application through their local councils for LED money, and let us get that money out and spent in the areas where it is needed.

Mr G Kelly: Go raibh maith agat. The Minister spoke on a number of occasions about the difficulties that SMEs face in trying to get at some of the moneys involved. Is she aware that that is similar to the problems that they have in trying to drawdown moneys from the European framework programme 7? She also spoke about microfinance. Has she had any discussions with OFMDFM about that difficulty and how to get over it?

Mrs Foster: With regard to the moneys that are available through FP7 and the successor to FP7, part of the difficulty has been that SMEs do not have the capacity to access that money, and my colleague the junior Minister knows very well that it is something that exercises us a great deal. When

Commissioner Máire Geoghegan-Quinn was over with us last year, we very much impressed upon her the need for SMEs to be able to access European moneys in a more meaningful way. I also mentioned that to MEPs to see whether they can assist us in any way.

Go For It Programme

6. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the current Go For It programme run by Invest NI. (AQO 1407/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Go For It brand encompasses a number of enterprise awareness, business start-up and business growth initiatives undertaken by Invest Northern Ireland.

As such, Go For It includes activities around youth, social enterprise, female entrepreneurship and neighbourhood renewal. It also included the delivery of the former enterprise development programme focused on business start and growth of local businesses.

3.30 pm

The House will be aware that as a direct result of the legal action undertaken by Enterprise Northern Ireland, Invest Northern Ireland is not in a position to deliver a business start programme. That means that an important part of the overall Go For It service cannot be provided in the manner we all want to see on the ground and in local communities.

Invest NI is providing an interim service that is focused on responding to enquiries and signposting to other sources of support, but that cannot be compared to a fully functional programme. Invest NI is able to continue to promote that idea of entrepreneurship through its Go For It brand, and that is particularly important in those specific areas I have mentioned, such as youth, neighbourhood renewal and social enterprise.

My assessment is that that work is valuable and, indeed, essential to the stimulation of public interest in enterprise, entrepreneurship and business start, and as an important contributor in providing routes to self-employment for those groups that tend to be under-represented in the business community.

Mr Speaker: Order. That ends Question Time.

Private Members' Business

Decade of Centenaries

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly notes the number of centenaries of significant historic events affecting the UK and Ireland in the next 10 years; calls on the Executive to ensure that these are marked in an inclusive manner; and further calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to work together, with the British and Irish Governments, to develop a co-ordinated approach to the commemoration of these important events in our shared history. — [Mr Lyttle.]

Mr Swann: The first part of the motion states:

"That this Assembly notes the number of centenaries of significant historic events affecting the UK and Ireland in the next 10 years".

So far, the debate has dealt with an holistic, aspirational approach of how we will move forward as an inclusive society in an inclusive Northern Ireland and how we will all respect each other's terms, histories and traditions. As the culture spokesman for the Ulster Unionist Party, I want to focus on some of those events that are of fundamental importance to unionism and those events that set us apart but can make us equal as well. They can do that, so long as we can accept the shared history, encourage an understanding and accept why they are important to us and this side of the House.

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

I will take the time to remind the House and the public who are listening of a few of those events that are present and important to us in our history and will go down as our events through this decade of centenaries.

April 1912 was an important time for unionism. The first commemoration will be that of the Balmoral review, where 250 Orangemen converged on the Balmoral showground declaring that under no circumstances would they accept home rule. One of the other main events of 1912 — one that has been highlighted many times in the House — was the signing of the Ulster Covenant on 28 September 1912 in opposition to home rule for Ireland. That iconic document was signed by 237,368 men. Some 234,000 women signed a parallel declaration. The Ulster Unionist Sir Edward Carson was the first person to sign the covenant at the Belfast City Hall. He was followed by Lord Londonderry, representatives of all the Protestant Churches and Sir James Craig. The signatories, 471,000 in all, were against the establishment of a home rule Parliament in Dublin. A British covenant, similar to the Ulster Covenant in opposition to the Home Rule Bill, received two million signatures in 1914. The covenant is now digitised and can be accessed through the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI). I encourage all Members to search for their ancestors to see if they signed the Ulster Covenant back then.

The covenant is a fundamental part of the history of Northern Ireland and is part of the architecture of the Ulster Unionist Party. As an Ulster Unionist, I am proud of the

contribution my party made in those significant times. So significant were they, that they are commemorated in the Rudyard Kipling poem, 'Ulster 1912'.

So great was the threat of home rule in 1912 that the Ulster volunteers were founded as a militia to block home rule for Ireland. Latterly, in 1913, they were organised into the Ulster Volunteer Force, with many of its members enlisting with the 36th (Ulster) Division at the outbreak of World War I. The 36th (Ulster) Division has gone down in history for its valiant efforts in the battle of the Somme, which must also be commemorated as a centenary in 1916.

What must also be commemorated is how the same sacrifice was paid by members of the 10th and 16th Irish Divisions. After the battle of the Somme, Captain Wilfred Spender of the Ulster Division's HQ staff was quoted in the press as saying:

"I am not an Ulsterman, but yesterday, the 1st. July, as I followed their amazing attack, I felt that I would rather be an Ulsterman than anything else in the world."

That is how we should commemorate and go forward into this decade of centenaries — as Ulstermen.

The eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month in 2018 will represent the centenary of the end of the war to end all wars, a day when remembrance of all who fought and died in that war, and since, will be to the fore. They, like others, must be remembered.

The Representation of the People Act 1912 gave the vote to women over 30 years and, in 1928, that age qualification was lowered to 21 years. That will be covered later by my party colleague Sandra Overend.

As Members who spoke previously have highlighted, there is a need for a joined-up approach. It is, of course, important that all commemorations are marked in an inclusive manner and that there are no attempts to rewrite what happened 100 years ago as a justification for nearly 40 years of terrorism. The Ulster Unionist Party played the leading role in many of those events 100 years ago, and it will play an integral role in their commemoration.

It is important that we remember the events in our history, but it is also important that, in remembering them, we do not relive them.

Mr McDevitt: History can haunt or liberate. It can, as we well know, educate but, tragically, also divide. The coming decade can, in the opinion of my party, lay the foundations for a new Ireland, or it can entrench the prejudice and ignorance that has grown up over the past century.

The time has surely come to move on, and things are often not as simple or straightforward as they seem. Edward Carson, the first signatory of the covenant was a fellow Dubliner, a hurler and a man as opposed to the partition of Ireland as any you could possibly meet. James Connolly was a Scot; he had served seven years in the British Army with distinction, and yet he was executed for his republicanism and socialism by the very Crown he served. In 2002, Connolly was voted by Britons the sixty-fourth most influential person in British history. Last year, he came third, behind only John Hume and one other, in a poll of the most influential Irish people.

Connolly has a special place in my heart because it was to my great-grandfather's house that he came, at the turn of the 20th century, to organise trade unions in Belfast. He lodged with my great-grandfather for about six months. When he came to Belfast — or so, at least, family history will tell you — he did not come as a particularly ardent Irish republican. He came simply as someone who believed that the right of working men and women was a right that must and should be upheld, irrespective of their sense of identity. In fact, he tells us something about history that we could well reflect on in the next decade. He is recorded by Diarmaid Ferriter in his book 'The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000' as saying:

"'history, in general, treats the working class as the manipulator of politics treats the working man — that is to say, with contempt when he remains passive and with derision, hatred and misrepresentation whenever he dares evince a desire to throw off the yoke of political or social servitude. Ireland is no exception to this rule. Irish history has ever been written by the master class — in the interests of the master class.'"

Those are important words to reflect on as we set off on this decade. A century on, we must make sure that there is no writing of history by any master class — be it a new one or an old one — and that we seek understanding, depth and reconciliation in our history.

Last year, another person in another place said:

"This was the decade of the covenant and the gun, of blood sacrifice and bloody politics, a time of division and war, not only on this island but across the world. It was the decade that defined relationships on these islands for most of the last century."

That individual said that he went on to

"recall with immense pride that it was a period that saw the achievement of Irish independence and the foundation"

of the modern Irish state, but also with great sadness that it saw the partition of Ireland and its people and two parts of Ireland losing touch with each other and their shared heritage. He said that for most of the last century, we looked across the border, and we saw; what we saw, we were afraid and wary of.

He continues:

"We forced each other into making choices, into defining ourselves in exclusive terms. We failed to recognise that, even though we have different traditions and perspectives, what we share is much more important than what separates us."

Mr Byrne: The home rule period lasted from 1868 to 1910, with the third Home Rule Bill being enacted in 1912. Does the Member agree that, throughout that time, the home rule movement was a major democratic political movement that had legitimacy and that legislation was duly passed in the House of Commons? Is that an issue that also should be reflected in the commemorations?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McDevitt: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thank Mr Byrne for the intervention and will return to his point in my closing remarks.

The gentleman I was quoting went on to say:

"We collectively failed to capture the complexity of identities on the island. For too long, we concentrated on our differences. For too long, those differences were magnified. And for too long, the similarities and commonality of our interests were forgotten or ignored. We created separate histories — British and Irish, orange and green, republican, nationalist, unionist, loyalist — deep wells from which we thought we could draw succour."

Of course, that was only the then Taoiseach, Brian Cowen. He makes some very important points. He makes the point that history must never be used to entrench division. In the coming decade, this generation has the greatest duty ever to be placed on a generation of Irish democrats, be they British-Irish, Irish-Irish, Northern Irish, Ulster Unionist or whatever, and it is the duty to ensure that history becomes a foundation stone and not a yoke.

Coming back to Mr Byrne's point, it is worth noting that all the leaders of the rebellion were home rulers in the years before it. One of them, who died in the trenches, was Tom Kettle. His only counsel to Ireland at the time of third Home Rule Bill was this:

"to become more deeply Irish, she must become European."

Mr Irwin: We have reached a point in our society where, in the next few years, important points in history will be remembered in the context of centenaries. Some of those events will be remembered with more appreciation than others and by varied audiences with varying levels of interest. Indeed, there will be those in society who will take little interest in any of the centenaries. However, the fact remains that important points in our history will be reaching their 100-year milestone and people will be marking those occasions in many ways. The media has been trying to talk up the possibility of contention surrounding the various centenaries, and there has been considerable interest in this motion from many quarters.

We must not forget, however, that we in Northern Ireland have been celebrating much older events on a yearly basis for centuries. There is no greater event or spectacle than the Orange Order's Twelfth of July celebrations. Indeed, I can recall the magnificent tricentennial events organised by the Orange Order in Northern Ireland to commemorate the 300-year anniversary of the Williamite victory at the Battle of the Boyne. Those events were enjoyed by thousands of people. The annual celebrations grow in popularity year on year, with tourists coming to Northern Ireland from far and wide, some from as far as Canada, on a yearly basis to view the parades.

Given the undeniably positive progress that has been made in Northern Ireland in recent times, and the reality that Northern Ireland is made up culturally of many different strands and opinions, there is a definite requirement for everyone, from a public perspective and a public representative perspective, to view upcoming centenaries with a sense of tolerance.

As a member of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee and as someone from a Christian, Protestant and unionist

background, I am looking forward to marking a number of the centenaries, such as the great sacrifice laid down at the Somme by our grandfathers and great-grandfathers. Those men were from Protestant and Catholic backgrounds — something that is slowly becoming more recognised — and fought and died side by side for the freedoms we enjoy today.

There are other events that will not resonate so well with me, but I cannot deny that they occurred or that other people hold them close to their hearts as part of their identity or culture. In essence, the debate seeks to promote a tolerance that we can use as a basis on which to move forward on centenary issues. That will, I think, be the view of most in our society.

3.45 pm

Recent concerns noted that paramilitary groups and factions may use centenary events to further their own ends. That must be rejected and condemned as unwanted and unacceptable. Communities must show their objection to any such hijacking attempts from whatever quarter.

Although celebrating a milestone can be positive and uplifting, it should be remembered that the key word for many of the centenary events should be “commemorate”. There is a distinct difference between celebrating and commemorating. The greatest respect is shown if, in circumstances where, for instance, great loss of life has been a reality of an occasion such as the Somme, every effort is made to commemorative and respectfully remember those who paid for our freedom with their lives.

I feel that there will much more debate and discussion on this issue as time progresses. However, it is important that the House sets an example that the public can follow. I look forward to further discussions at Assembly and local council level in the weeks and months ahead. I support the motion.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The aim of any commemorations in the near future should be to promote reconciliation and not to deepen division. However, the fact is that many events that took place around 100 years ago have different narratives and each is legitimate.

I listened with interest to the news on the radio this morning. Some of the events were mentioned: the formation of the UVF, the signing of the covenant, the Easter Rising, and so on. The presenter went on to say that perhaps the commemoration of ‘Titanic’ was as apolitical as you can get. In many ways, it is. We had the biggest ocean-going liner of its time, built on this island, in this city, just down the road. Not only is it connected to this city but it has a connection with Cobh in County Cork, in that it called in there on its maiden voyage. That was the last port it was in. We then had the tragedy of the sinking of ‘Titanic’ and the terrible loss of life on that fateful night.

Some people, particularly from a unionist perspective, have asked why nationalists on occasion are lukewarm about ‘Titanic’ and the commemoration. It is quite simple: because there is a different narrative, not about ‘Titanic’ itself but with regard to the shipyard and the discrimination that took place in the shipyard. I am not trying to strike a discordant note. I use that example simply to illustrate the different narratives that exist about the same events, and each narrative has its own legitimacy.

Those events should be located in their wider political context. We all know that, back at the start of the last century, many of those events created reactions that led to an acceleration of the conflict at that time. What we certainly do not want to do with these forthcoming commemorations is to build up tension again to create conflict. It is important, therefore, that if there is any civic or grant aid to be handed out to any commemoration committees there should be a pre-requisite that the events will be inclusive and non-triumphalist and will not be coat-trailing exercises. Councils, the Assembly and the Oireachtas should ensure that any planning groups are made up of all parties.

It is important that everyone be allowed to participate in events as long as they are comfortable with that; no undue pressure should be placed on people to participate in events with which they are uncomfortable. The Queen’s visit to Dublin was mentioned today, a visit with which Sinn Féin was uncomfortable. We are uncomfortable participating in other annual events and have challenges with all those issues.

Interestingly, I was asked whether the Queen’s visit posed challenges for republicans. My answer was that I thought that the visit posed more challenges for unionists, because the Queen was commemorating people who gave their lives fighting against Crown forces in Ireland. That presents a challenge for unionists. Republicans also have challenges, and I am sure that, as a party, Sinn Féin will meet a lot of those challenges and be happy to participate in events with which we would not normally be associated.

I welcome Nelson McCausland’s words over the weekend. He said that he would be prepared to participate in, for example —

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

Mr Sheehan: — a debate about the 1916 Rising. We should remember that anything we do should add value to the peace process.

Mr Humphrey: The decade of centenaries presents a great opportunity to demonstrate our growing maturity as a society in Northern Ireland. Indeed, it will provide a real test if some people in this community are incapable of moving on. The centenaries mark a number of significant dates that shaped the history of what has become Northern Ireland and our neighbouring state, the Republic. If we are serious about building a society that is at peace with itself, all of us across the Chamber and across our community — we must stress at all times that we have one community in Northern Ireland — must step up to the plate and give leadership.

As someone who is Presbyterian, unionist, from an Ulster-Scots background and proud to be an Orangeman, I am confident of what I am. I believe in civil and religious liberty for all and welcome and appreciate diversity in our community. Diversity has often been seen as a weakness or a threat in Northern Ireland, but I believe that it is a strength. We should exploit our diversity as a positive. More than 50% of tourists across the world are cultural tourists, and, in my view, nowhere is there such a cocktail of diversity as in Northern Ireland.

Respect, tolerance and understanding are the cornerstones on which we must build our new, united Northern Ireland and deal with our national and international difficulties of

perception and reputational problems. It is important that events marking our history are commemorated accurately and constructively and, as far as possible, inclusively. For too long in Northern Ireland, those who fostered division, exploited traditional difference and demonised have set a negative agenda. That must stop. The attitude and strategy around traditional Orange parades is an obvious example. Last week in the Chamber, I put a question to the deputy First Minister. In response, he said that he absolutely agreed with me that the cohesion, sharing and integration document should reinforce the need for tolerance and celebrate cultural diversity and identity in Northern Ireland. I welcome that shift from Sinn Féin and the shift, and comments, about the Queen's visit to Northern Ireland later this year. I also welcome the Queen's leadership when she visited the Republic, a leadership that others were unable to meet.

Institutions of the state such as museums, schools, universities, libraries and PRONI should help to educate and to address ignorance, prejudice, propaganda and distrust. This year, we will commemorate the centenary of the signing of the Ulster Covenant and the culmination of the home rule crisis. I call on the House to show maturity and recognise the fact that, for us as unionists, Ulster day is hugely important and that it should be made a public holiday in Northern Ireland to recognise the significance of 28 September for the unionist tradition.

The year 2013 is the centenary of the formation of the UVF and the IVF. The year 2016 will have significant celebrations for both communities. For my community, it will be the Somme and all that happened there. Indeed, as Mr Irwin said, there is a growing acceptance across this island and across our community that there is a huge contribution of Irishmen to be commemorated, North and South, unionist and nationalist, and of course the Easter Rising as well. The culmination of everything that flowed from that will be the celebration of Northern Ireland as a state within the Union.

It is time that we looked at the positives in Northern Ireland. As a place, Northern Ireland has come far: it is a much better place than it was years ago. The Titanic is an example. Out of that awful, negative, disastrous event positive things are now flowing. As we move forward together, with the constitutional question resolved, we owe it to our community — and as I said earlier, I make no apology for repeating that we are one community — to build for a positive future. We must build a society that is at peace with itself, where tolerance is the norm, where accepting division is a strength and where history cannot be rewritten.

Northern Ireland is a changed and changing place. We must secure our future based on understanding and difference. We must celebrate our different cultures, value them and keep Northern Ireland moving forward. As we endeavour to build a shared future and a shared space, this will be the acid test for the parties across the Chamber and for all sections of our community.

Mrs Overend: I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate today. I thank the proposers of the motion for bringing it forward. Given the 10 years of centenaries on which Northern Ireland is about to embark, this is a timely debate.

My colleague Robin Swann dealt with the historical and cultural significance of the centenary events from a unionist

perspective, and he outlined the fundamental role that my party has played in the foundation of the state and in the intervening years. Indeed, as he spoke, my mind was drawn to the various monuments inside and outside this Building, and I feel that we should use and promote all available artefacts to share the story of these past events, including the table on which the Ulster Covenant was signed.

I also want to mention briefly one event that falls within the decade of centenaries, and that is suffrage. Women throughout the UK campaigned considerably for the right to vote. It was finally granted in 1918 through the passing of legislation, namely the Representation of the People Act and the Eligibility of Women Act. The 100th anniversary of that should be marked to commemorate how far our society has come in that respect. Indeed, this is an excellent opportunity to promote the contribution that women can make to the political process and engage more women in politics in Northern Ireland today.

As economy spokesperson for the Ulster Unionist Party, I want to approach the debate largely from a tourism point of view. The motion mentions the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment specifically, and she has a vital role to play as we commemorate important centenaries such as the signing of the Ulster Covenant; the battle of the Somme, in which the 36th Ulster Division played such a crucial role; and the first Parliament here at Stormont.

We have a one-off chance to take advantage of these historic centenaries, encourage tourism and give the Northern Ireland economy a much-needed boost. Tourism targets set out in the last Programme for Government were not met, and we must learn from that. Tourism is a key driver of the economy. I recognise the good work that is being done in the industry, especially in relation to the five signature projects: the St Patrick and Christian Heritage project; the Mourne project; the Causeway Coast and Glens project; the Walled City of Londonderry project; and the Titanic project. However, I call on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to ensure that adequate time, effort and planning are given to ensuring that we are making the most of the opportunity to increase tourism through the commemoration of the various centenaries outlined in the House today.

As the motion suggests, this is a cross-departmental issue. Today, I note that the Minister for Employment and Learning committed funding for WorldHost customer service training this year through the skills solution service, as well as developing a short training package with the Northern Regional College to assist the sector in upskilling staff on the north coast. That is the type of proactive approach that must be encouraged, and I ask the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the work ongoing in her Department to ensure that Northern Ireland capitalises economically on the decade of centenaries this year and in the coming years.

4.00 pm

In conclusion, I will mention the draft tourism strategy. That draft document dates back to February 2010, but it has not yet been published as a full strategy. It is still in draft form. Although that is concerning in itself, I ask the Minister for clarification on the strategy's status, as it offers an opportunity. It is supposed to provide a clear vision for the development of Northern Ireland's tourism experience

through to 2020, but the Titanic is the only centenary event that it mentions. Given that Northern Ireland is so rich in cultural heritage, and given what we have heard today about the wide range of imminent centenaries, I challenge the Minister on why the draft document does not include any plans for such important events as the signing of the Ulster Covenant. The opportunity is there to remedy that particular failing of the draft document, so I urge the Minister to do so.

The decade of centenaries is vital to the Northern Ireland tourism industry. Commemorations must be inclusive if we are to attract visitors and subsequently boost tourism revenue. It is also an opportunity to show how far Northern Ireland has come and to signpost where we, as a society, want to get to in the future. For those reasons, I support the motion.

Dr McDonnell: I welcome the opportunity to make a few comments about the decade of centenaries that is on us at the moment. This forthcoming decade of centenaries, and how and why events of various types are commemorated, will be a critical test of our political maturity and of the responsibility of each and every Member of the House and the Executive in particular. It is important that the decade of centenaries is discussed on the Floor of the Assembly. However, the SDLP believes that responsibility for the approach should not be left in the hands of a few Ministers and that it should most meaningfully be not just discussed on the Floor of the Assembly but placed at the heart of the Executive programme.

The approach must be inclusive and co-ordinated. The SDLP believes that it must be fundamentally underpinned by a set of agreed principles and protocols informing an ethical, critical and factual remembrance. That is the approach that we will take wherever the issue of remembrance and commemorations arises, whether it is here or in councils across the country. Achieving agreement on overarching principles to guide the commemoration of a decade of political turbulence 100 years ago is no easy task. However, it is an essential task. We, as a community, cannot afford to ignore or pretend that it did not happen, nor can we afford to pursue a tit-for-tat approach that is set in a superficial framework of, "I will go to a banal event of yours if you come to a banal event of mine." Events and gestures must be of substance and meaning. Empty gestures will do nobody any good.

I have no doubt that we will not reach a consensus on the narrative involved, but we can and should secure agreement on some underpinning principles and protocols that will define a consistent, fair and inclusive approach to all the key events from 1912 right through to 1922 and beyond. Many of our academics and local communities have been debating the issue for some time and, to an extent, have led the way in establishing the principles and frameworks for ethical and shared remembering.

In the time that is afforded here today, it is not possible to go into greater depth. However, it is the SDLP's view that commemorative events must be based on a clear understanding of and generosity to not only the diversity but the interdependence of our history. Although we might see different narratives, there is a clear interdependence between all the events.

The events must be open to fresh interpretation based on the facts as they emerge. The sometimes silent alternative stories must also be heard, whether that is the alternative

Ulster Protestant men and women's covenant signed in 1912 or the fact that some 26 children were killed as participants in the Easter Rising.

The SDLP believes that it is vital that we do not just remember the past but ask honest, critical questions about it and that articulating a vision for the future and looking forward is as much a part of the process as looking back. The decade of centenaries presents the Assembly and the Executive with a challenge and an important opportunity. By "the Assembly", I do not mean the body but each and every Member of the House. Some will look to hijack events, to rewrite history and to set up a narrow version of their history. That cannot be allowed to happen.

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. I appreciate and agree entirely with all he said. Does the Member agree that, if Governments take the lead on this, they should appoint Committees and advisory groups that are representative and reflective of society in Northern Ireland? That is how we will get to the position he is talking about.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Dr McDonnell: I am very happy to get to the stage where we are discussing the issue honestly and openly. I urge the Government to get to grips with it. I believe that there has been a certain shyness or reservedness. This is a difficult issue, and I am not taking away from that. A lot of people could be hurt if it is not dealt with sensitively and properly. However, I believe that honest engagement, be it in the Chamber or in other places, will help us through what could be a divisive period.

The forthcoming decade presents the Executive and, as I said, each and every Member with a challenge and an important opportunity not to allow events to be hijacked. As political leaders, we must be responsible and as ethical as we can be. That applies as much to the language that we use as it does to the moves we make or the things we do. We must encourage people to honestly engage in discussions around shared differences and the common and interconnecting themes of our history.

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

Dr McDonnell: We must use the opportunity to educate ourselves and each other at all levels, be it in our schools, our communities or in the House. We must commemorate not celebrate.

Mr Frew: I certainly welcome today's debate but maybe not some of its content. I thank Mr Lyttle for proposing the motion, the wording of which I commend and agree with. I am very passionate about the issue. It is important to us that all significant historic events affecting the UK and the Republic of Ireland are recorded, remembered, explored and certainly learned about.

Some events will be described by some as celebrations, while others will describe them as commemorations of the past. That is OK; it is justifiable. However, the decade of centenaries also offers us an opportunity to record and teach people, particularly our young people, about the history, and when I say "the history", I mean "the history" not "our history" or "their history", which I heard said in the Chamber even today. We should not talk about "our

history" or "their history". It is "the history" — the history of Northern Ireland and the people. To label events as "our history", "their history", "one section of history", "one section of our people's history" or "one section of history that ignores another part of history" does a great disservice to the people involved in those events. It is "the history" — the history of Northern Ireland and the people. That is the most important thing that can be said about that statement.

Glorifying or justifying acts of violence or terrorism cannot be allowed, and there can be no excuse for triumphalism. Not one person in the Chamber remembers or was there to witness the events that we talk about; I do not think so anyway. However, what is sure is that, when we come to teach our young people, we should do so based solely on facts and figures, and then on the context of the age in which those people lived and the ramifications for the UK and what became the Republic of Ireland.

If there is a challenge for anyone around learning and understanding our past or the past, that is the challenge for them.

There should be no rewriting of history. It really annoys me when I hear and see attempts to rewrite events of the past 40 years that we have all had experience of and that we can all remember very vividly. That should not be the case. We all know that the people who were involved in the events of 100 years ago would have had their own experiences, views, thought processes and political viewpoints. That is important and should be explored because it will add to the learning process for our young people. Children in our schools learn about historical events throughout the world. That is fine. I love Greek history and hearing about wars throughout the world and how they affected European, British and Irish history. I have absolutely no problem with that. However, more must be done to teach our young people about the history and people of Northern Ireland. We do not know how those events affected our ancestors. It is important that those events are not just memorised or commemorated and celebrated at a high level; they should be remembered in our streets and homes, so that people know the difference that a certain event made to a street. We talk about the young men in the 36th Ulster Division; the population of young men from one street was wiped out, and that street should know about it. In that way, our young people will not only be able to learn about the past but will be able to touch it, and that is very important.

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

Mr Frew: Our young people should be able to touch those commemorations. It is not something that the Assembly should just debate and forget about or celebrate and commemorate. Our young people should have a deep understanding of such events.

Mr Douglas: I also commend Chris Lyttle and his party for tabling the motion, which I support.

Pat Sheehan talked about some of the difficulties in the shipyard over the years. I would be the first to acknowledge that, at times of tension, not just in the shipyard or in east Belfast but across Northern Ireland, there were major problems. Last summer, as part of the West Belfast Festival, I spoke at the City Cemetery, where all my relatives are buried. In an initiative undertaken by Councillor Tom Hartley, a headstone was erected in memory of Samuel Scott, a young man of 15, who was the first person to die while

working on the Titanic. It was interesting that loyalists and republicans were at the graveside. In fact, a lament was played on the flute by a member of the North Down Defenders Flute Band, I think. As part of my research, I found that, when the Titanic was being built in 1912, over 3,000 of the workers were Catholic. Today, we are looking at our history and talking about learning from it, which is exactly what Paul was saying. It is not just about educating our young people; it is about educating ourselves as well.

The timing of the debate is very important. It is encouraging that other institutions and organisations have debated how we deal with a decade of centenaries coming quickly down the track for us all. I pay tribute to Belfast City Council. Last week, it gave approval, on a cross-community basis, to back civic celebration plans for the Queen's diamond jubilee. Hopefully, we in the Chamber will learn from that civic leadership and work together and show respect to one another.

I believe that the positive mood music, as the late David Ervine used to call it, is the result of the inspired leadership that was shown by Her Majesty The Queen on her visit to the Republic of Ireland last year.

During her visit to Dublin Castle last May, Her Majesty said to President McAleese:

"speaking here in Dublin Castle it is impossible to ignore the weight of history, as it was yesterday when you and I laid wreaths at the Garden of Remembrance.

Indeed, so much of this visit reminds us of the complexity of our history, its many layers and traditions, but also the importance of forbearance and conciliation. Of being able to bow to the past, but not be bound by it."

Those last words are key. President McAleese spoke of not being able to change the past but choosing to change the future. That has been one of the most positive aspects of a positive debate.

4.15 pm

I remind Members that the Ulster Covenant was signed by more than 3,000 people in my church, the Westbourne Presbyterian Church. Many people will know its inspired leader, the Rev Mervyn Gibson. The church will hold a series of talks to explain the Ulster Covenant. I have the leaflet here. The talks will cover an introduction to the Ulster Covenant and themes such as Presbyterianism and the covenant, nationalism and the covenant, and women and the covenant — in support of Sandra's point of view. My church will host that series of events, which is open to all, at the bottom of the Newtownards Road. It is hoped that people, both those who take pride in the covenant and those from the tradition that opposes it, will be challenged and informed by the talks.

Mrs McKevitt: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that educational seminars, lectures, museum exhibitions, plays and other cultural displays are a good way to commemorate potentially contentious events, such as the Ulster Covenant and the Easter Rising, and that we need to encourage artists and historians to become actively involved, because they can challenge old assumptions, rather than conform to them, and give new perspectives on the past?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Douglas: Thank you very much. The Member makes a very good point. In fact, on 16 March 2012, we will hold our sixth, I believe, St Patrick's Day breakfast in east Belfast. We had hoped that the Rev Dr Paisley would be able to come along and speak. I hope to God that he is and that he is well and strong enough. That event has encompassed people from right across Belfast, not just east Belfast. St Patrick's Day was also a contentious event in the past. There are still problems, such as those in Downpatrick recently. At least, as the Member says, we are trying to debate the matter and encourage people to be involved.

In conclusion, we have focused entirely on centenaries. As Pat Sheehan said, let us also remember the 100th anniversary of the sinking of the Titanic on 15 April 1912. One of the deadliest peacetime maritime disasters in history, it resulted in the deaths of 1,517 people. Let us not forget. I commend the motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Arlene Foster, to respond to the debate.

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Can you explain why only those who support the motion have been called to speak in the debate? Surely it is a basic tenet of debate that the voice of dissent should also be heard. It is also a basic requirement of Standing Order 17(5) that due regard should be had to the balance of opinion on a matter. Can we have some explanation as to why only those who wish to support the motion have been given the opportunity to speak?

Mr Deputy Speaker: As Deputy Speaker, I must have regard for Standing Order 17. I have looked at it carefully. A number of other Members indicated that they, too, wished to speak. I must have due regard for party strength and the number who indicate that they wish to speak as well as for opinion. Certainly, the Member has not approached me or indicated to me any particular point of view that he wishes to make known. In the past, I have endeavoured to listen carefully to everyone's point of view and ensure that individuals such as him and, indeed, others have an opportunity. That is the judgement that I must make while I am in the Chair. On this occasion, I have judged to hear other Members. That is my decision.

Mr Allister: Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker, I point out that, twice today, I gave notice of my intention to speak against the motion. I informed the Clerk to your right this morning, and I repeated that observation during the currency of the debate. Therefore, I am surprised that you, Mr Deputy Speaker, are ignorant of that. Of course, I accept what you say, but, nonetheless, I am very surprised that that was not conveyed to you.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I said that you did not indicate to me that you wished to speak in any particular way. I acknowledge that you passed a message to a Clerk. However, I do not think that it is a good way of doing business if a Member simply says that he or she wishes to speak against a motion and, on that basis, expects to be called on every motion that is on the Floor. I have taken a decision on this occasion.

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): First, I commend the Members who proposed the motion for providing us with the opportunity to debate

this very important subject. That importance is shown by the media attention that there has been on the motion today.

Representation on these Benches and the experiences and journeys that have brought us to this place highlight that our history is complex. I think that that has been reflected in the many contributions that we heard today. At times, that experience has been difficult and painful, but it is intertwined, shared and connected in many different ways. I listened very carefully to Members' many contributions this afternoon, and I was struck immediately by the fact that there were many different voices, yet none was discordant. There has very much been a feeling of moving Northern Ireland forward and wanting to recognise what happened in the past while recognising where we are today.

So, there is a clear acknowledgement from all parts of the House that the many events that shaped our history over the past 100 years and more are worthy of commemoration. However, they are worthy of commemoration in a manner that demonstrates maturity, balance, inclusivity and good, honest common sense. It is abundantly clear that many of the events that were mentioned during the debate can be joyous and uplifting celebrations. Of course, there must also be a place for the many commemorations of the tragic events of the past that need to take place. If they are not managed sensibly and responsibly, all those events, whether they are celebrations or commemorations, can have the capacity to arouse passions, cause anger, provoke tension and exacerbate community division. We must avoid that at all costs.

In countless places and on countless occasions in recent months, I have said that 2012 offers an unparalleled opportunity for us to present to the world all that is best about Northern Ireland. I hope that I do not need to remind the House — I am pleased that Mr Douglas was one of the last Members to speak — that Titanic Belfast will open in a month's time and that that will be followed a little later in the year by the opening of the new visitors' centre at the Giant's Causeway. We shall also relish hosting the Irish Open at Portrush for the first time in over 50 years, and we will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Belfast Festival at Queen's in the autumn. The whole year is also punctuated by an extraordinary number of large and small events that, individually and collectively, can demonstrate that we, as a community, and, as one of my colleagues said, as a society, are moving on together sensibly, co-operatively and thoughtfully.

Of course, there will be differences of views and emphasis as this year and the years that follow roll past, and there will be many events that will mean more to some people than to others. However, we must all respect everyone's right to remember the significant events of the past that have, in one way or another, contributed to making us the people that we are and to making Northern Ireland the place that it is today. Therefore, I urge anyone and everyone throughout Northern Ireland who is considering how best to mark a particular anniversary in the coming months and years to do so in a manner that takes account of how their behaviour and actions will be viewed by others inside and, importantly for me as tourism Minister, outside Northern Ireland. The world is a very small place these days, and modern technology means that images of Northern Ireland can and will be beamed around the world pretty much instantaneously.

I am confident that the images that will be broadcast this year will be those that we want the world to see — positive, exciting and stimulating — and we need to make sure that that is maintained once the immediate thrills of 2012 and 2013 are behind us.

There will, of course, be a role for my Department, and in particular the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland, in continuing to promote and market Northern Ireland as a place that everyone should visit at least once in their life, although I would say a lot more. I commend both organisations for their efforts in this exciting but very busy year.

I also accept that, as many Members said in the debate, the commemorations that we have been discussing today will involve other Departments and a great many individuals and organisations outside government altogether. That is why the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure and I will bring a joint ministerial paper, which is at an advanced stage, to the Executive in the very near future, which will address the fundamental principles that will surround what we need to see happening in this decade of centenaries. I know that the need to put those fundamentals in place has been mentioned by a number of Members today.

I will be talking to other ministerial colleagues in the coming months, who will, in turn, talk to organisations such as the Community Relations Council, the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Arts Council, National Museums Northern Ireland, the universities, the Public Record Office and countless other bodies as plans begin to be made. It is not solely for us to carry through all the plans and projects, but I wholeheartedly believe, as do the Executive, that it is for them and the public sector to give a lead.

There needs to be considerable community involvement throughout the process. Indeed, for the commemorations to be genuinely inclusive there will be a need for the close involvement of members of community organisations the length and breadth of Northern Ireland. We cannot allow a small number of people to decide how we celebrate and commemorate over the next 10 years. We need it to be inclusive, and that is true of the Northern Ireland Executive and the Governments of the Irish Republic and the United Kingdom.

In all such matters the key words might legitimately be balance and boundaries: any celebration or commemoration of an historical event must demonstrate balance. We know that there is no single, clear, agreed interpretation of history; indeed, too often, commemoration events take place not so much to remember the past but to use that past to make a modern point or to legitimise a modern stance. I thought that Mr Frew's contribution was very true: we need to listen to the history of what happened, what are the facts of those years, and how do they affect us today? How can we learn from all that went before?

It is not about commemorating the past based on a partial myth, an isolated viewpoint or a narrow perspective. Context is everything in what the Executive are trying to do in relation to the commemorations and celebrations over the next 10 years. The commemorations must remain within the boundaries of propriety. Nothing must be said or done by anyone that could be interpreted as glorifying or justifying acts of violence or terrorism, irrespective of who carried out such acts; neither can there be any excuse for triumphalism.

With that in mind, I commend to the House the series of lectures that begins next week at the Ulster Museum and Stranmillis University College under the title of Remembering the Future. The lecture programme, which, I understand, has been organised by the Community Relations Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund, seeks to discuss the critical period in our history between 1912 and 1923. It will do so in keeping with five key principles that we can all accept: to start from historical facts, as Mr Frew pointed out; to recognise the implications and consequences of what happened; to understand different perceptions and interpretations; to show how events and activities can deepen an understanding of the period; and to see all of that in the context of an inclusive and accepting society.

However, I caution that, when we look at events of the past, we do not look at them through the eyes of someone who is living in today's Northern Ireland in 2012, because those things happened in a completely different era. Words such as "discrimination" do not put us in the context of where we were at that time, and that is all-important.

4.30 pm

I commend that series of lectures to the House; it will provide a very handy guide to what is happening in the coming years. We also want to remember Sammy Douglas's commercial: he always gives us a commercial of some sort. I look forward to an event on the Anglicans, Sammy, as well as the Presbyterians, which we have had today. We want to ensure that the commemorations avoid some of the pitfalls to which I have referred. We need to enhance the reputation of this small part of the world as somewhere that has a fascinating and engrossing history but which is imaginatively moving forward from a troubled past to what we all hope will be a more stable, positive and prosperous future.

As I said, 2012 and 2013 offer a wonderful opportunity to celebrate Northern Ireland and to project a very positive image to a vast international audience. The decade of commemorations that will follow offers us a further opportunity to build on that new reputation and to demonstrate to that same international audience that we have genuinely and permanently come of age. I urge all Members to take full advantage of that opportunity and to do so with responsibility, maturity and, importantly, inclusivity.

I thank all the Members who spoke on the motion. I hope that I have covered most of the points that Members made. Most of them, including Mr Sheehan, referred to the importance of not deepening divisions. Mr Humphrey talked about a cocktail of diversity. Mrs Overend mentioned Mr Farry launching the WorldHost training programme; of course, that was a joint launch between DETI and the Employment and Learning Minister. She is right to say that the tourism strategy has not yet come forward from the Executive. That was an industry-led document that was drawn up by industry and given to me to bring to the Executive. It has been felt that since we are now in changed economic times, we need to take cognisance of the Programme for Government and the new economic strategy so that the tourism strategy sits alongside all those documents. I hope that the tourism strategy will come out at the same time as those other documents. Mr McDonnell referred to the fact that this is a test of our political maturity. I agree with him; we need to have agreed principles

and protocols, and that is what the joint paper from the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure and me is all about.

Again, I commend Chris Lyttle and his party for bringing the motion to the Floor of the Assembly. It has given us a good opportunity, and, on the whole, most Members have taken the opportunity to be quite reflective and thoughtful about the time that is in front of us. I hope that that bodes well for the next 10 years.

Mr Lunn: The debate has been a really useful contribution to the general discussion that is ongoing about the next 10 or 15 years, and it is now gathering pace as we approach the first major centenary, the Ulster Covenant, in a few months' time. I wonder how the debate would have gone 10 years ago. I do not think that it would have been quite as agreeable as the debate that we have had today, and that, perhaps, is an indication of how far we have come in the meantime and is to be welcomed.

Anniversaries are always with us. We have a constant supply to deal with. Indeed, we are already at the point of 40 years from some highly significant occurrences within our memories, and by the end of the decade that we are talking about, we will be 50 years from those. That is a more significant date that will have to be dealt with, so, if we can agree, based on our motion, to handle the upcoming centenaries in an inclusive manner and for the relevant Departments here to work together to co-ordinate a common approach with the British and Irish Governments, we will do a great service to Northern Ireland, the Republic and the UK.

As my colleague said when introducing the motion, if we can meet the challenge, the coming decade gives us the potential to learn from our past and to shape our future. Chris also pointed out the obvious downside, such as deepening antagonism and reinforcing old divisions rather than focusing on future progress. He was right to put that warning on the record, as others have done also. However, I believe that the signs are encouraging, and the developments and actions of the past few years give me enormous hope for the future.

The Queen's visit to Dublin — to the Garden of Remembrance and to Croke Park and her momentous speech at Dublin Castle — has paved the way for us, just as President McAleese's visit to the Somme and the joint opening of the Irish peace park has done so much to put aside old enmities and prejudices. When history is being made in front of our eyes, we do not always realise just how significant it is, and we do not quite get the historical impact of current events. So, in years to come, the full significance of Her Majesty's actions and those of the president will become even more evident.

As others have referenced, the anniversary of the battle of the Somme had, until comparatively recently, the potential to be divisive. However, that has surely now changed, and North and South can commemorate that sad but uplifting episode in our joint history together. It was just Ireland then, and Irish men from all over the island fought and died together and set aside their differences for the greater good. I had the privilege of visiting the Somme in 2010, and I pay tribute to the work of the Somme Association, which has always made the point about the all-Ireland aspect. Indeed, I should declare an interest as a member of the association.

I do not know how many Members have been to the Somme. I suspect that most of those to my left have, perhaps, been, and maybe a minority of those on my right have been. I see some nodding. I encourage them to go, and when they do, the contrast and the contradictions will stare them in the face. The fallen from Irish and British regiments are lying together, and there is a memorial for Major Willie Redmond, who was bravely fighting for the Allied cause while his brother pursued a different strategy back in Ireland. There is a stone in the Irish peace park engraved with the words of an Irish soldier. From memory, it goes, "I wish that I could see again the hills of Donegal; I'll be a traitor if I return but a hero if I fall". Those days are gone. We should look forward to that commemoration with confidence.

The other significant dates, such as the Ulster Covenant, the Titanic, the Easter Rising and the various dates at the end of the decade on partition, the civil war and the establishment of the Irish Free State are all contentious, but we can deal with them. Even as this debate was looming over the weekend, I heard constructive noises coming from Sinn Féin and the DUP, and today, again, I have heard little of any kind of dissent from the thoughts —

Mr Allister: *[Interruption.]*

Mr Lunn: I suppose that I did ask for that.

I heard Mitchel McLaughlin on the radio this morning talk about Sinn Féin's willingness to participate in the commemoration of the Ulster Covenant. He even talked about Sinn Féin organising its own commemoration. I am intrigued. The mind boggles as to what kind of commemoration that would be. However, that is positive. Nelson McCausland also talked on the radio about his willingness to participate in events to do with the Easter Rising. He qualified that a bit by saying that he could participate in a panel discussion or, perhaps, attend a lecture. He may find that there is a bit more to it than that.

One of the successes of this Assembly has been to encourage trust and understanding, and we should build on that and, under the terms of the motion, acknowledge our shared history without rancour. It has been ably demonstrated today that we are capable of doing that.

I will turn to some things that Members said. Stephen Moutray talked about pivotal events and their potency, power and the almost nuclear aspect of some of them. That is fair enough, but he also said that we should remember the past with sensitivity and that he wanted cross-community support.

Mitchel McLaughlin gave us a history lesson. He did not get the year of the covenant right, but he got the date right, and I am very impressed with that. He said that Sinn Féin will participate when it is possible to do so and that it has a working group on the preparations. He also said — I think he was slightly at odds with his party colleague Mr Sheehan — that he was quite moved by the Queen's visit to Dublin. I think it was Mitchel who said that the GAA has said that it will attend any events that it is invited to. That is all positive stuff.

Robin Swann came up with one that I had not heard of — the Balmoral review in April 1912. That was a new one to me. We can all learn. He also advised us to go and search the records for our ancestors who may have signed the covenant. I am happy to tell him that my grandfather did sign the covenant. Mr Swann also highlighted the 10th and 16th

Irish divisions and the potential for the 100th anniversary of the end of the war in 1918.

Conall McDevitt mentioned Lord Carson and pointed out that he was a Dubliner and a hurler, and that Mr Connolly was at one time a British soldier. There is no end to it. The contrasts hit you up the face when you look into it. Conall also said that there should be no rewriting of history by the master class. That phrase, "no rewriting of history", was mentioned by many people from both sides of the House, so there is agreement here.

William Irwin referred to the Orange celebrations and the difference between celebrating and commemorating. I will not go there. The 12 July is very much a celebration.

Pat Sheehan talked about the need to promote reconciliation and not deepen division. He talked about the 'Titanic' as being not quite apolitical and some nationalists still being lukewarm about it. Sammy Douglas reminded him that there were 3,000 Catholics who worked on the 'Titanic'. I believe that there were about 50,000 Protestants, but there we are. The point is that, when the world and his wife come here in a few months' time to look at the Titanic centre and to look at the place where it was built — thousands of people come to Cobh already every year, and they also go to the memorial in Newfoundland — they will not really mind who built it. It was a Northern Ireland achievement. It was an engineering achievement that was unparalleled 100 years ago.

William Humphrey mentioned civil and religious liberty for all, a cocktail of diversity and that commemoration should be inclusive. There we go again. All sides of the House. Sandra Overend rightly played up the role played by the Ulster Unionists down the years. Absolutely right. Alasdair McDonnell said that it should be inclusive and that it must be at Executive level. That is a point that was echoed by the Minister. The Executive have a serious part to play. Paul Frew mentioned teaching our young people "the history". I do not care if it is the history or our shared history. It is the history of this place, without bias, and I hope that we can go there.

I am sorry that I do not have time to mention other people's contributions. In closing, I want to say that a lot of people, more important than us perhaps, have played a part in bringing us together in the last number of years.

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

Mr Lunn: I am thinking of David Trimble, John Hume, John Major, Albert Reynolds, Tony Blair, Bertie Ahern, George Mitchell, Ian Paisley, Gerry Adams, Peter Robinson and Martin McGuinness. In mentioning Ian Paisley, please forgive me, Mr Deputy Speaker, but I want to extend our best wishes to his DUP colleagues and his family. We have not heard much about Dr Paisley in the last few days. I hope that he is keeping well.

I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the number of centenaries of significant historic events affecting the UK and Ireland in the next 10 years; calls on the Executive to ensure that these are marked in an inclusive manner; and further

calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to work together, with the British and Irish Governments, to develop a co-ordinated approach to the commemoration of these important events in our shared history.

Adjourned at 4.44 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 28 February 2012

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Speaker: Before we proceed to today's business, I advise the House that I received a letter this morning from the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure advising that she is not in a position to make the intended statement on salmon conservation today. There will be a statement on planning issues immediately after Question Time. So, there will be only one statement to the House this afternoon.

Executive Committee Business

Department of Justice

Mr Speaker: The First Minister and deputy First Minister have tabled a motion to continue operation of the Department of Justice from 1 May 2012. The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The deputy First Minister will propose the motion and will have 10 minutes in which to do so. The First Minister will conclude and make a winding-up speech on the debate, and he will also have 10 minutes in which to speak.

One amendment has been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the amendment and five minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): I beg to move

That, pursuant to paragraph 8(1) of schedule 1 to the Northern Ireland Act 2009, the Department of Justice established by the Department of Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 is to continue operating from 1 May 2012.

A Cheann Comhairle — Mr Speaker — it is almost two years since this Assembly requested the devolution of policing and justice responsibilities in March 2010. The transfer of responsibilities was achieved in April 2010, and few in this Assembly would now want to put the clock back. Most of us would agree that local democratic responsibility for these powers is a great improvement on unaccountable direct rule.

The First Minister and I made clear at that time that the arrangements for appointing a Justice Minister were on an interim basis and were subject to review in the light of experience.

In 2008, we first raised the mechanism of a sunset clause, which would require the reassessment of the interim arrangements by May 2012. That was given statutory force in Westminster legislation in 2009, which held up the threat of the dissolution of the Department of Justice on 1 May 2012 unless the Assembly had passed new legislation to adopt alternative arrangements or had passed a motion such as this.

The dissolution of the Department of Justice on 1 May 2012 would be a drastic eventuality; it would create considerable legal uncertainty and is to be avoided if at all possible. The prospect has understandably concentrated minds in recent months. In October 2011, the Assembly tasked the

Assembly and Executive Review Committee with reviewing the initial arrangements for appointing the Minister of Justice.

Last autumn, the work of that Committee established that there were continuing differences of views between political parties on the ministerial arrangements that should apply after 1 May 2012. The Committee identified the options favoured by each party and sidelined some options that were not practical. However, the Committee was not able to make specific recommendations in its report.

After a debate on 29 November 2011, the Assembly noted the report, and the Chairman of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee concluded that the way forward is for the Assembly's political parties to decide through the First Minister and the deputy First Minister and other party leaders.

Shortly after that debate, the First Minister and I initiated discussions with the other political parties. After extensive negotiations, which had not established a consensus between all the parties, we put a number of proposals to the participants on 10 January 2012 asking for comments within a week. We proposed that the Assembly be asked to pass a resolution extending the current arrangements for electing a Justice Minister beyond May 2012. That would be without prejudice to arrangements following the next Assembly election or the outcome of the statutory review required by the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006.

After considering responses from the parties, the First Minister and I announced our decisions on the way forward statement of 18 January. We indicated that we would seek Executive approval to bring a resolution at the earliest opportunity to the Assembly to extend the present justice arrangements beyond May 2012.

We gave a commitment on addressing some of the Alliance Party's concerns in relation to the effect of the Westminster legislation on the Justice Minister's tenure of office. The statement also dealt with the future of the Department for Employment and Learning and the wider review of post-2015 institutions. The Executive recently agreed to our tabling the motion that we are debating today. It refers to schedule 1 to the Northern Ireland Act 2009, which contains a sunset clause; it also cites the Department of Justice Act 2010, which is an Act of the Assembly that established the Department of Justice.

If the Assembly passes the motion with the necessary cross-community support, it will mean that the sunset clause will not take effect on 1 May 2012. It will also mean that the arrangements for electing the Minister of Justice by parallel consent, which had been used in April 2010 and May 2011, will continue to apply after 1 May this year. Again, that is without prejudice to future consideration of the arrangements that might apply after 2015. I should add that in respect of the commitments that we gave in the way forward document, on 23 January, we wrote to the Secretary of State asking him to introduce Westminster legislation to bring the tenure of the Minister of Justice into line with all other Ministers in the Executive.

We have asked that the necessary legislation be taken forward at the earliest possible opportunity. We have also written to the Speaker committing our parties to supporting any Justice Minister elected by cross-community vote and to oppose any attempt to use the provision unique to the Justice Minister to remove him from office.

That commitment will apply pending enactment of the amending legislation at Westminster that we have asked for. I commend to the House the motion that the Department of Justice continue operating from 1 May 2012.

Mr A Maginness: I beg to move the following amendment: Leave out all after "2009," and insert

"a second Act of the Assembly which results in the Minister of Justice being appointed by d'Hondt is brought forward to ensure that the Department of Justice is to continue operating from 1 May 2012."

The SDLP amendment is about defending and preserving the values of the Good Friday Agreement. It calls for the appointment of the Minister of Justice by way of d'Hondt, which is the original methodology set out in the Good Friday Agreement. That agreement was endorsed by people, North and South, on this island and by an overwhelming majority. It is with that authority that the Assembly has political legitimacy. It is with the authority of the people of Ireland, North and South, who exercised their franchise in support of that agreement, which was the first time that the people of this island of Ireland exercised simultaneously their political will since 1918. That is a very important historic fact. That is the power of the Good Friday Agreement, and that is the basis upon which the Assembly is founded. All the other institutions under the Good Friday Agreement — the North/South Ministerial Council, the British-Irish Council and all of them — derive their authority from that.

The amendment reflects the kernel of the Good Friday Agreement: the principle of inclusive government and partnership between the two great traditions here of unionism and nationalism. All those who have significant political support, derived from any election, have as of right a place in government. Why should that be? As many critics claim, it does not happen in other jurisdictions. It is because of our history of exclusion, division, alienation and conflict — a conflict that created a situation in which more than 3,000 people died, several thousand were seriously injured and society was traumatised by savage political violence that nearly saw the collapse of civilised living in Northern Ireland. The agreement established the concept of inclusive government in order to establish a real and genuine partnership between Catholic and Protestant, nationalist and unionist; a partnership that would, through spilling our sweat, not our blood, bring about the conditions in which a genuine and sustained reconciliation would take place between our two great traditions and communities in Northern Ireland.

We could, as a result of this bold political experiment, transform our society and change the historical legacy of bitterness and division and hatred. Reconciliation is the objective of the Good Friday Agreement, and partnership is the means of achieving that. For those reasons, the SDLP is rightly precious about the agreement — precious in preserving its integrity. Therefore, we will criticise, and have criticised, any serious departure from the agreement, and we have warned constantly about the adverse consequences of departing from it. Some of those consequences are as yet unseen.

In this instance, we see serious departure from the agreement by way of electing the Minister of Justice on a cross-community vote instead of by d'Hondt. We see that

as a departure from inclusivity and partnership. We see the misuse of the cross-community vote as a perverse political act, designed to obstruct legitimate political appointment under d'Hondt.

Mr Campbell: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: No, I want to continue.

It was designed to exclude, initially in 2010, the SDLP and, following the 2011 election, the UUP from providing the Minister of Justice. The use of the cross-community vote was a naked political expedient, perversely used by the DUP and Sinn Féin to consolidate their political ascendancy and to continue their political carve up in the Executive. It was, and remains, a cynical gerrymander designed to get them out of a hole and exclude the SDLP and Ulster Unionists. It certainly was not about building inclusion, and it certainly was not about developing partnership. In essence, it is anti-agreement; in spirit, it is subversive of the agreement and corrosive of the partnership ideal.

The departure from the agreement in this instance is now to be further consolidated by this motion until the next mandate. Sinn Féin says that at the next mandate it will return to d'Hondt. The DUP says that it will not and that it will actually seek to end the use of d'Hondt for everything.

10.45 am

A Member: Hear, hear.

Mr A Maginness: I hear somebody endorsing that view.

In fact, the DUP wants to see the end of the Good Friday Agreement, and through acts of political expediency like this and other expedient acts, it may well achieve that aim. Complicit in that gerrymander was the Alliance Party, which abandoned its principled opposition for the unprincipled seeking of office and power. Indeed, by sacrificing principle for office, it got its just reward. The Alliance Party's servility and subjugation to the DUP and Sinn Féin is something it will live to regret.

Finally, the unintended and perverse consequence of the Minister of Justice gerrymander was the ludicrous position of the Alliance Party having two seats in the Executive with eight MLAs, the Ulster Unionists having twice that number of MLAs but only one Minister and the SDLP having one Minister but 14 seats. That made a mockery of the Executive and was so unjustifiable that even the DUP and Sinn Féin were ashamed and embarrassed by it. Unfortunately, the Alliance Party did not share that embarrassment.

In order to remedy that perversity, the DUP and Sinn Féin have decided to indulge in another exercise of political expediency and dispatch the Alliance Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Farry, together with his Department. I have little sympathy for the Alliance Party in that situation, although I have some sympathy for Dr Farry. I remind the Alliance Party that, if you have no political compass and no political direction, you will enter into Faustian political deals. If you enter into those deals, you will get what you deserve.

Now we are told that we will end up with a so-called "proper" political balance in the Executive, brought about by another piece of political chicanery. That political expediency will produce further unintended consequences and will further corrupt our politics. The lesson is clear: do not eat the

forbidden fruit and stick to the letter and the spirit of the agreement. I support the amendment.

Mr Elliott (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): I thank those who tabled the motion and the amendment. I will speak briefly as Chairperson of the OFMDFM Committee before I speak on behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party.

The Committee has had very limited input to the entire process. We were asked for our thoughts when the Assembly and Executive Review Committee brought forward its paper some time ago. At that stage, it was discussed at Committee. However, we decided that, because of the wider party and parties' aspect, we would leave it to individual parties to make their responses to the Assembly and Executive Review Committee. From discussions among party leaders, we understood that, at some, stage, the matter would probably come before parties to discuss in more detail anyway. The Assembly and Executive Review Committee believed that it was, quite honestly, too much for it to try to come to a conclusion, given that the matter was to go to a much higher level.

The Ulster Unionist Party was clear in its opposition to the devolution of justice two years ago and on the reasons for that opposition, particularly the funding and carve-up issues. However, at this stage, we believe that it would be a retrograde step for the Assembly and Executive and for the overall confidence in the institutions in Northern Ireland not to continue with the Justice Department under the auspices of the Assembly and Executive.

Alban Maginness highlighted issues with the political carve-up that we, in the Ulster Unionist Party, have sincere concerns about as well. We are concerned that many of us are being, or feel that we are being, left out in the cold. However, we appreciate that the First Minister and deputy First Minister brought all parties into the discussions last month and gave us all the opportunity to put forward our views.

We also hear clearly that it is not just about the Justice Ministry; it is about the much wider impact on the Assembly and Executive. We are hearing about much wider opportunities. The deputy First Minister outlined some of those in his opening remarks, such as the broad agreement on removing the Department for Employment and Learning. I would like to hear, reasonably soon, the detail of that, because we need to give Members some opportunity for discussion, as opposed to just making it happen. That process needs to be much more inclusive.

Over the past weeks, I have listened to the Alliance Party, particularly the Justice Minister, threaten not to take up its position of Justice Minister in an attempt to pressurise the Assembly and Executive into doing something different or maybe just to hold on to the Department for Employment and Learning for its benefit. The Ulster Unionist Party, immediately after last year's elections, brought to all-party discussions proposals that would have resolved the issues of the Justice Department and Ministry for the current term of the Assembly. That was not accepted by some parties, but we believed that we were genuine. We wanted to make a genuine contribution that, we hoped, would give some stability not only to the Department of Justice but to the running of the Assembly and Executive for the current term.

I need to refer to the running of the Justice Department since its inception two years ago. I declare a sincere disappointment

in many aspects, even though I said that it would have been a retrograde step not to have it here. The Department and Minister's administration of the part-time Reserve payment and gratuity scheme was proven to be very poor. My colleague Ross Hussey took an interest in that issue and drove it forward.

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

Mr Elliott: I am hugely concerned about how that scheme was delivered and administered.

Mr Humphrey: I support the motion. For any unionists in the Chamber, the return of powers formerly held by the Home Affairs portfolio in the Northern Ireland Parliament was a welcome step. Better to have a devolved Minister here in Northern Ireland looking after our affairs than a transient Minister, without that level of knowledge, coming across on a part-time basis from London.

I pledge no support for, or loyalty to, the Belfast Agreement. I opposed it when I was a member of the Ulster Unionist Party; I campaigned against it, and I continue to oppose it.

Mr McDevitt: Will the Member give way?

Mr Humphrey: The DUP clearly advocated a cross-community election — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Humphrey: The DUP advocated a cross-community election model before justice powers were devolved, and we support its continuation now. Justice is a hugely important and, indeed, sensitive portfolio in the Northern Ireland Executive; more than any other Department it requires cross-community support, and the people of Northern Ireland must have confidence in it. Northern Ireland is a changed and changing place with a society that is developing a more mature outlook on politics. However, confidence is the key.

If that Department was triggered by d'Hondt like the others, there would not be that confidence in Northern Ireland at this time; therefore, the time is not yet right to incorporate justice in the running of d'Hondt. The inclusion of justice in d'Hondt must be part of wider negotiations along with issues such as a reduction in the number of Departments, Ministers, Members and Committees in this place and the whole structure of government here, which, my party has continued to argue, is too big for the size of Northern Ireland and the population that we represent.

There have been difficulties in the Department, and Mr Elliott outlined some of them. However, the arrangements in the Justice Department have worked reasonably well, and, in my view and in that of my party, they would benefit from the continuation and stability of the appointment of a cross-community Minister. The motion addresses the sunset clause. The fears that we had in the past of the Department being dissolved will not be realised. Different arrangements may develop in future. However, a constitutional crisis, as happened so many times when Mr Trimble was First Minister, cannot happen again as we mature and progress.

As I have said, a local Minister with justice powers in local hands is a good thing for Northern Ireland; some people are clearly uncomfortable with that. However, the key is that we have stability and continuity as we develop as a society, as Northern Ireland matures, as politics develop, as people

grow in confidence, and as the structures of this place have growing support from the people of Northern Ireland. I listened to Mr Maginness's plea for the life support machine of the Belfast Agreement to be switched on. He must realise that the Belfast Agreement is from another time; it is from another political philosophy and leadership.

Mr McDevitt: Like you.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Humphrey: Indeed, it is from another millennium. I have to say to Mr Maginness, "Hell hath no fury like a would-be Minister scorned." He has not recovered from the fact that he is not the Minister of Justice. He knows why. The people of north Belfast would not have had confidence in his holding that position, as my colleague Mr McCausland outlined at the time.

Mr A Maginness: They have elected me four times. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Humphrey: Therefore, I have pleasure in supporting the motion and opposing the SDLP amendment.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Beidh mé ag labhairt ar son an rúin agus i gcoinne an leasaithe. I will speak in favour of the motion and in opposition to the SDLP amendment. The deputy First Minister said that this is familiar territory; it is a debate that we had a number of years ago. Having worked as a member of the Justice Committee for the last number of years, I see the importance and benefit of ensuring that we have a local Department held to account by local political representatives and that we scrutinise that Department properly.

The vision, as outlined by the SDLP, would have ensured that that did not happen. I suppose that, in many ways, that is no surprise because, for a long number of years, the SDLP said that the task of trying to transfer justice and policing powers to the North was beyond us. Indeed, when it was negotiating a long time ago, it never saw that as a priority. We certainly made it a priority, and we delivered the Justice Department and a mechanism that ensured that powers were transferred.

11.00 am

We had a similar debate to this one in the Assembly a number of years ago, and from listening to Alban Maginness's contribution this morning, I think that he is making the same argument. From his point of view, I suppose that his argument has not changed. The one big thing that has changed, however, is the priority that his party gives to the issue. I would like to have heard the SDLP outlining what priority it gave to this in last year's election manifesto, and perhaps other Members will take the opportunity to do so. What priority did the SDLP give to it during the many debates and hustings and when its members went to the doors? How many doors did they knock? Did they make the issue a priority? Were they saying to the people that they should vote for the SDLP to ensure that the Justice Department is run in a different way or a particular way?

Mr McDevitt: I appreciate Mr McCartney giving way. I am sure that he has read the SDLP manifesto and knows that

that was clearly stated in it. Indeed, he will know that it was clearly stated in his party's manifesto that this should be done by d'Hondt. What is regrettable is that he has come to the House to support a motion that goes against the pledge that he put to the people when he stood as a Sinn Féin candidate. He could support our amendment, which is consistent with his party's manifesto.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr McCartney: Thank you very much for the added minute, Mr Speaker, and I thank the Member for the intervention.

I was fielding a question that I was going to answer myself but you posed it instead. The people spoke, and they decided, based on the emphasis that you put on the issue versus the emphasis that we put on it, that they were against those who run a negative campaign and who are, in my opinion, negative for the sake of being negative. Let the people speak.

Mr A Maginness: We have been extremely positive.

Mr McCartney: We will let the people decide.

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us not debate across the Chamber.

Mr McCartney: Mr Maginness made a great play to the will of the people. I think that the will of the people was very clear last May. Indeed, I think that your party — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McCartney: I will not go into the inner machinations of your party. The way your party came out of that election was as a result of the decisions about the way in which to run the campaign. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McCartney: If we are going to say, "Let the people decide" and "Let the people speak", I think that the SDLP should perhaps learn lessons from that.

Alban Maginness talked about people not having a moral compass. At a particular time, that suited the SDLP in this institution. We can all recall that when Seamus Mallon resigned as deputy First Minister, there was a mechanism, which was devised by the SDLP in a carve-up — if that is the type of terminology that we are going to use today — between it and the Ulster Unionists to enable him to "unresign". I think that that was the first time in a long time in political history and perhaps in any organisation where a person one day said, "I am resigning on a point of principle" — we all knew what that point of principle should have led to — and then, like a flash out of the dark, suddenly said, "I am now 'unresigned'". The SDLP was comfortable with that, and perhaps for good reason: it did not want these institutions to fall. It wanted, from its point of view, to see things flourish. This is why we have this model in place.

Our position is very clear: we want d'Hondt, and we will continue to work towards it. We did not allow the Department to remain in the hands of politicians at Westminster. We wanted it in the hands of the politicians whom the people of the North of Ireland elected to do the job. That is why we will be rejecting the amendment and supporting the motion.

Mr Lyttle: I support the motion and oppose the amendment. I will begin by stating that the Alliance Party's overriding concern since 2010 and to this day has been the devolution of policing and justice powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly. The current arrangement has successfully provided for the devolution of justice over the past 18 months and has allowed for greater accountability and more effective delivery of justice-related issues than in recent memory in Northern Ireland. Under the 2010 Act, the Assembly must now have arrangements in place for 1 May 2012 if it wishes to ensure the continued operation of the Department of Justice. It is, therefore, imperative that the Assembly find agreement on the issue; a failure to agree would be a backward step for Northern Ireland. The devolution of justice powers has enabled a Minister to be appointed and endorsed by the Assembly; no other Minister has that support and confidence under current mechanisms. The ministry of justice was appointed by the House rather than by a mechanism with the departmental work programme agreed in advance.

The devolved ministry of justice delivered the first justice Act in almost 40 years and a comprehensive youth justice review; it took difficult decisions on an unsustainable legal aid budget; and it secured agreement from the UK Home Office that all criminal assets seized in Northern Ireland would be used for crime-prevention schemes in Northern Ireland. For once, meaningful action was taken on the removal of so-called peace walls. Perhaps, most importantly, the devolution of justice has provided a platform on which enemies have stood together in the pursuit of law and order for this jurisdiction.

I understand that the SDLP opposes such progress; it claims that it is anti-agreement. I believe that the electorate has spoken on that view. The SDLP amendment calls for the Minister of Justice to be appointed under the d'Hondt mechanism. The Alliance Party is long on record as saying that it does not view d'Hondt as the best mechanism for the appointment of ministerial posts. My party has always endorsed the principle of power sharing. However, we believe that coalitions should be agreed voluntarily. If the process of agreed and voluntary coalition were used for the formation of the Executive, it would provide for more effective and cohesive government. It would reflect the very spirit of the agreement.

The Alliance Party has always believed that the Assembly should be able to demonstrate its support for all Ministers by a weighted majority, which is not possible under current arrangements — except for the Minister of Justice. It is for those reasons that we do not support the SDLP's amendment. It is critical that the administration of policing and justice remain operational in Northern Ireland and not fall back to direct rule. I would have thought that no Member of the House would want to see powers returned to Westminster.

The Alliance Party's aim is for the Minister of Justice and all Executive Ministers to be appointed as part of an agreed coalition with the endorsement of a weighted majority of the House. It has held consistently that d'Hondt is not the ideal way to form the Executive. The Alliance Party is also committed to playing a constructive role in a responsible review and reduction of the number of Departments and MLAs. However, that is not the issue of today's debate, which is that of continuing the important delivery of justice in Northern Ireland. The Alliance Party, therefore, supports the motion and opposes the SDLP amendment.

Mr Givan: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion. Most people will agree that the devolution of justice has worked in Northern Ireland, although I have disagreed with elements of what the Department has tried to do. Fortunately, however, because of its accountability measures, the Assembly can stop such elements. That relates to the issue of the continuity of the office of Minister of Justice when the individual who holds it is appointed by cross-community vote. In my view, that is irrelevant. Every Minister in this place is subject to the accountability measures that were negotiated at St Andrews. Therefore, the nature of the tenure of the office holder is irrelevant because of changes that we negotiated.

Through the devolution of justice, we have been able to open up an area in the Northern Ireland judicial system that needed to be examined in order to get transparency in the way in which justice agencies operate. We have done some good work, as has the Minister in reforming legal aid. Changes that were brought forward on that front were good, and the Committee for Justice supported them. Although the SDLP opposed changes in the fee structure, the Committee supported the Minister in taking forward those changes. Some Members have greater expertise on abuses of the legal aid system; they will have a better understanding of how fees were claimed and paid out. However, greater transparency in how such administration operates in different systems is a good thing for Northern Ireland. Slowly but surely, cultures in those professions are changing. That has to be welcomed.

We have also seen changes to more victims-orientated agencies in the justice systems. The Public Prosecution Service, for whatever reason, appointed a victims' champion only within the past couple of months. I think that that was because of pressure that the Assembly was able to put on those organisations about their need to get their priorities right. Dealing with victims is an area with which people have been very unhappy, and, slowly, we are seeing changes in how those different agencies are operating and dealing with victims. That has to be a good thing.

I listened with interest to the SDLP complaints about gerrymandering and to the Ulster Unionist Party complaints about political carve-up. I say to the Members of those two parties that I know that you may not like it, but the electorate has decided to reject your two parties. That may be difficult for you to comprehend, but those days are over. You need to get used to playing second fiddle. We will not treat you in the way that your parties, when they were in the ascendancy, treated this party when we were not involved. We will involve the Ulster Unionist Party and the SDLP. I think that you need to come to that recognition. It is taking a very long time for you to realise that the electorate no longer puts its trust in your parties in how this place is governed. That is difficult for you to understand and to get used to but, eventually, you will get there.

Others, particularly the Member for North Antrim, warned at the time of the devolution of justice that Armageddon was going to happen. There were prophecies of doom saying that the devolution of justice would mean that Martin McGuinness would be able to appoint judges. People were given warnings about that. It did not happen. The same warnings came out at the time of the St Andrews Agreement, when it was said that we were all going to be forced to speak Irish because of an Irish language Act. It did not

happen. I think that people are realising that we have these predictions and prophecies from the Member from North Antrim that do not ever materialise.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Givan: No, I will not give way.

Mr Speaker: Order. We should not have debate across the Chamber. A number of Members are trying to debate across the Chamber, and a number of Members want to make a contribution to this debate. If they continue, they may not be called. Allow the Member to continue.

Mr Givan: The Member for North Antrim will have an opportunity —

Mr Allister: Will I?

Mr Givan: The electorate may not have afforded him that opportunity under the rules of the Assembly, because there is only one individual. Do not blame me for the electorate not giving your party enough votes to give you more speaking rights in this place.

I think that the way in which justice has operated in Northern Ireland has demonstrated that it can be handled maturely in the Assembly and the Executive and that it is better for the people of Northern Ireland to have it in our hands than the way it operated under direct rule. Under direct rule, we would not have had our accountability levers in our hands. I know that the Member for North Antrim wants us to have to sit idly by and be unhappy with what happens from Westminster, but we have it in our hands and in our gift.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Givan: We will hold the Minister to account for whatever action he may decide to pursue in the future.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I speak in support of the motion and oppose the amendment. As we all know, the devolution of policing and justice powers and the justice Ministry came about after long, difficult and complex negotiations. Was the outcome of those negotiations perfect? No, it was not perfect. We would have preferred that the Justice Minister was elected by d'Hondt in the same way as all the other Ministers in the Assembly. However, we know that that was not possible at that time.

The SDLP is aggrieved at that, because it felt that the justice Ministry should have been its ministry. In his speech, Alban Maginness talked about how Sinn Féin and the DUP perversely used and cynically gerrymandered the process to exclude the SDLP. Perhaps the Member has not noticed that Sinn Féin did not benefit from the outcome of those negotiations, and, in fairness to the DUP, neither did it. He went on to say that the method of electing the Justice Minister was:

"corrosive of the agreement and subversive".

Well, on the contrary, what happened was in the spirit of the agreement. The spirit of the Good Friday Agreement is about working together, working in partnership, solving our own problems, and being imaginative and forward looking.

11.15 am

I know that the SDLP has done a fair bit of grandstanding here today. However, the fact is that, in private, the SDLP admits that the only way that policing and justice powers would have been devolved was by what happened in the negotiations and the method and procedure that is used today for the appointment of a justice ministry.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Member for giving way. He says that, in fact, the use of the cross-community vote is not a perverse act, and that it is in the spirit of the agreement. Yes, it would be in the spirit of the agreement if it was used properly, but it was used to exclude, not to include. That is the point that I am making, and that is why it is perverse and corrosive of the very values of the agreement — the values of inclusivity in government and partnership.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Thank you for that intervention. The question that the SDLP needs to answer is this: is it more important to have policing and justice powers devolved to this Assembly or for the SDLP to get the ministry? — *[Interruption.]*

Mr A Maginness: It is not about that.

Mr Sheehan: No. It seems to me that the SDLP is putting petty party interests in front of what is good for this Assembly and good for the North. What is good for the North and for this Assembly is that we have local representatives here and not some fly-by-night Minister flying in from London to administer justice powers. That is what is important.

We in Sinn Féin hope that, in the next Assembly, the Justice Minister will be elected by the D'Hondt procedure, as with all other Ministers. However, in the meantime, we support the continuation of the current arrangements and oppose the amendment.

Mr B McCrea: I rise encouraged by the debate so far. Obviously, the debate on unionist unity is going awfully well. We seem to be getting a lot of good comments coming from that direction.

I will address the SDLP's amendment first. Alban Maginness quite rightly identified what he saw as the kernel of the Good Friday Agreement. The problem is that he has not addressed the kernel of the problem with our current arrangements, which is that we have not yet created trust or confidence so that we can select anybody in the House. It is not about individuals. It is that we seem to come down to the lowest common denominator.

With regard to the argument put forward by the Alliance Party when it trumpeted that it was the only party that had the confidence of the entire House, I feel that it rather overstated the case. There are considerable concerns about the criminal justice system and the delays. There were issues that I think even the First Minister raised when certain proposals were made about the badge of the Prison Service. There were also issues about prisoners getting out, somewhat without check. Therefore, there are lots of issues on which we do not have confidence in the way that things are moving forward.

I also want to address a point that Mr Elliott raised when he said that the Ulster Unionist Party was concerned about

the proposed devolution of policing and justice. We had concerns about the Budget. When the Chief Constable attended the Justice Committee, I heard him ask:

"Will the Executive stump up another £25 million for me into the next comprehensive spending review (CSR) period or will we simply remove a significant chunk of neighbourhood policing?"

There were and are legitimate concerns about the funding of our criminal justice system and our police service that have not yet been addressed.

I move on to the rather interesting position put forward by Mr Humphrey. That seemed to be some sort of personal attack. It did not seem to be a point of principle. We could do d'Hondt at some stage in the future but only if we got a number of other things sorted out. This is just another dirty deal. There is no principle at stake.

I am disappointed that the Chair of the Committee for Justice, Mr Givan, has not stayed in the Chamber to get a rebuttal to his arguments. When you dish it out in the Assembly, you should stay to face to music. You should be able to stand over your argument, to take interventions and to argue your point. Where is the Member from Lagan Valley to take on the debate, which you, Mr Speaker, rightly said that we should conduct through you and in the proper manner? It appears that we cannot do that.

What we really have here is the putting forward of an argument through which certain Members are trying to confuse the people. They are trying to say that black is white and that day is night. They are trying to tell us that we have consensus that this is the right way forward and a good thing. That is absolute nonsense. We have not yet resolved the key issues in front of us. If we genuinely want to have peace and reconciliation, and if we want to build on the tenets of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement — that agreement was about genuine participation, genuine inclusion and genuine working to resolve our difficulties — this is not the right way to go about it. We need to have the debate not just in this bit of the Chamber but in all parts of the Chamber. We want to have that discussion.

I have been waiting to hear whether any Members from the DUP Benches wanted to take me on in the debate. However, I can see none who proffer themselves —

Mr McCallister: Will the Member give way?

Mr B McCrea: I will indeed.

Mr McCallister: Thank you, Mr Speaker. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McCallister: Building on my colleague's argument: does he think that this is entirely the wrong way to do business? To end up with policing and justice powers, we had to undergo a crisis in the Executive, and as the Member rightly pointed out, the First Minister threatened to resign. We had a situation in which the Executive did not meet for 150 days. We had crisis talks at Hillsborough and the 14 snowmen of the DUP, who had all the spine of a tadpole.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute. *[Interruption.]* Order.

Mr B McCrea: Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is interesting, is it not, that the tone of this debate started off rather negatively.

Mr P Robinson (The First Minister): *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr B McCrea: Mr Speaker, I am willing to give way to the First Minister if he wishes to address — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Member to continue. *[Interruption.]* Order.

Mr B McCrea: Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is interesting that we are having a rather ill-tempered debate, when we are meant to have everything resolved and fixed and are just going to carry on. I find that rather incredulous. Surely if we are to have a proper debate, we should have had matters sorted out by all parties beforehand in a proper, democratic, open and transparent way. The UUP will reluctantly not push this —

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

Mr B McCrea: Absolutely, Mr Speaker. We will reluctantly not push this position. We find ourselves in a situation in which to do right for the country means that we have to put certain things aside. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr B McCrea: But the issues will not go away.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Eastwood: At the outset, I want to say that we, as a party, are keen to engage in a debate about the future structures of this Assembly. However, we insist that that is done with the principle of power sharing and reconciliation at its heart. That has not been the experience of the process to date. We have seen the refusal to accept the principle of power sharing and d'Hondt by those leading the Executive.

It is clear that the continued gerrymandering that surrounds the Justice Department is both anti-agreement and against the spirit of the agreement. Our view is clear: the only way to bring about the fair allocation of the justice ministry is through the process of d'Hondt. That process was not only in our manifesto but in Sinn Féin's manifesto. As it stands, no one on this side of the House can be Minister of Justice; in other words, no nationalist need apply.

I will turn to the issue of the other Departments. It is the SDLP's stated view that we should review the number and configuration of the Executive Departments. It is clear that the Department for Employment and Learning is being abolished not because it is not the best way of delivering for the ever-increasing number of unemployed young people in this society, but to continue the cosy carve-up of Departments in the Executive.

The Assembly and Executive Review Committee has begun a full review of Parts III and IV of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. We believe that that process should be used to decide any future make-up of the Executive and the Assembly. Any change to the structures of this House should be done with the principles of good government in mind, rather than perpetuating a discriminatory model for the appointment of the justice ministry or any other ministry.

In 1998, the people of Ireland, North and South, voted for the Good Friday Agreement. Whether people in this House like it or not, that is what happened. That mandate still stands, and it should be respected. The proposal at hand runs contrary to the wishes of the people of Ireland. During the debate it has also been claimed that the SDLP opposes the process only because we want the justice ministry. The fact is that we would not get the justice ministry if we ran d'Hondt for all the Departments. The SDLP's opposition to the proposal is about good government and the principles of power sharing. I support the amendment.

Mr Dickson: The failure of others cannot be blamed on the Alliance Party. We are doing a job, and we are doing it well for all the citizens of Northern Ireland. The d'Hondt mechanism does not afford the Assembly the opportunity to endorse nominations. The best vote possible is a cross-community vote, to which no one would take exception. Others are welcome to put their names forward, but only one will be chosen. In this particular case, this House has shown its endorsement of the Alliance Party nominee for the position of Minister of Justice. That is way things are at this point. The moral compass that guides the Alliance Party is one of cross-community support and of voluntary coalition in this House, not enforced and contrived mechanisms. As my colleague has clearly stated, the Alliance Party will support the motion and oppose the amendment.

Mr Allister: It has been almost two years since policing and justice powers were devolved. To some, that might seem like several political lifetimes, because of course there were those in this House who told us that aeons would have to pass before policing and justice powers were devolved. Then, one cold day in Hillsborough, Sinn Féin put their backs against the wall and threatened them that there would be no more Assembly and no more chauffeur-driven cars unless they caved in. They caved in spectacularly, as the snowmen and all melted away, and, once more, Sinn Féin got its way in this House and got the powers that were going to be so many political lifetimes away suddenly devolved in that sordid deal that was Hillsborough.

We were promised, of course, that there would be a momentous amount of money to help things, and that £800 million was coming our way. Where is it? I probed in the Budget debates last year, but the Finance Minister could not tell me where the £800 million was. Last night, I sat in a meeting of 200 people who were fighting to save their police station in the village of Broughshane because of cuts. Where is the £800 million that was going to save policing and justice and do all things marvellously well in that regard? That is another part of the con that attended all that.

How has it worked out? It has worked out so well that, at one point, the First Minister threatened to resign over the actions of the Justice Minister, who, surreptitiously, was going to destroy the symbols and the name of the Prison Service and had to be called to book by the First Minister. Now he wants to reappoint him.

Of course, this is a post for which no unionist need apply: pure and simple. Again, this is part of another deal with Sinn Féin and the DUP. It is not part of any negotiations in any real sense between parties in the House but part of a negotiation between Sinn Féin and the DUP in which, again, the compliant beneficiary will be the Alliance Party. Of course, it is going through the motions as best it can,

pretending that it is not really saying that it will take the Department. Who do they think they are kidding, Mr Speaker? Everyone knows that David Ford is itching to be reconfirmed as Justice Minister, whatever the party might pretend about having to be persuaded because it is not happy that Dr Farry is being made a sacrificial lamb. It says that it may not take the post and that its very important central council will have to meet and decide and that everything is very much up in the air. Nonsense: everyone knows that the Alliance Party is guaranteed to take it.

11.30 am

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for giving way. He makes an issue of the Alliance Party taking or not taking the justice ministry. If the Alliance Party were not to take it and it were offered to the honourable Member for North Antrim, would he be interested?

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

Mr Allister: There is as much chance of that as there was for the snowmen at Hillsborough.

We were told today by Mr Humphrey, I think, that the appointment is a great Belfast Agreement-busting device. Who does he think he is kidding? He is an implementer, as all on those Benches are, of the last jot and tittle of the Belfast Agreement. The tripartite stool still exists: the mandatory coalition, the joint First Ministers, the executive North/South bodies, the very essence of the Belfast Agreement — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Allister: All the things that the DUP once eschewed and said that it could never, never, never accept are the very things that it implements day and daily. As a prop to implementing them — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Allister: — it had to agree the transfer of policing and justice at Sinn Féin's behest. It agreed that to continue to prop up the very essence and substance of the Belfast Agreement. Anyone who thinks about it can see right through the transparent nonsense that has been talked by many in the House about policing and justice and can see that, again, we are headed down a road that underwrites that which Sinn Féin demands. What Sinn Féin wants, it gets. It got it in the House on policing and justice. Some say that I got it wrong: certainly not. I got it right — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Allister: — on the powers of policing and justice. That is why the DUP belatedly had to run scurrying to get changes made to the 2009 Act. It was asleep at the wheel and could not see and could not read what was in the 2002 Act and the 2004 Act and had to get it changed because —

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

Mr Allister: — I drew its attention to it. That is why some of the powers that are now going back for review were taken out in the 2006 Act. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member must be heard.

Mr Allister: It may well be reviewed back in.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Campbell: I am glad to be able to participate in this low-key and uncontroversial debate. I am also glad to be able to refute some of the utter nonsense that we have just heard from the man who was elected on the ninth count in North Antrim. First, I will deal with some issues of more substance.

In moving the amendment, the honourable Member for North Belfast Mr Maginness somewhat churlishly would not give way when I asked him to. I wanted to ask him what exactly had happened in the past 12 to 18 months or two years that would amount to the caving in of all that he claims had been secured some 14 years ago. Of course, given that I was not able to ask him because he did not give way, I did not get the opportunity to get an answer. However, the substance of the Department of Justice is the issue at stake. Who the person will be after the Assembly's decision on the Department is not the issue at stake; we will come to that another day. The issue is the principle of the Department of Justice.

A number of people have misquoted and misunderstood what has been said in recent years about the Department of Justice. It may not be the first time — it remains to be seen whether it will be the last time — that the former Member for West Belfast and now TD for Louth, Gerry Adams, and the Member for North Antrim, Mr Jim Allister, sing off the same hymn sheet. On the day that Mr Adams left this Assembly to seek pastures new in the Irish Republic — we wish him good riddance in his exodus from Northern Ireland — he made allegations in this Building that are similar to those made by Mr Allister. He said that the DUP had said that it would be light years and political lifetimes before we would agree to the devolution of justice. He said that I had said that. Not only did I never say that, but no one else on these Benches ever said that. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Campbell: We said that it could be a political lifetime before a member of Sinn Féin would be a Minister of Justice, yet the former Member for West Belfast and the present Member for North Antrim seemed to overlook that. However, those are the current facts, and they will be the facts post-May 2012. That is the position, and that is the way it is.

We have to try to work through the next five years, which will take us to a point beyond 2016, when some people talked about a centenary that would mark an event that they thought would transform politics on this island. Well, we shall see if they are transformed. Hopefully, they will be transformed in a good way so that Northern Ireland, with a Minister of Justice, can co-operate with another country to the south of it and work to defeat terrorism and dissident republicans and any others who try to disrupt and defeat the will of the people in Northern Ireland. That is what a Minister of Justice needs to do, whoever that person may be.

We need to ensure that the principle of establishing the Department is in keeping with the underlying principles that underpin this Assembly, whether it is done through d'Hondt or through a cross-community vote. There seem to be some within nationalism who have not only a loyalty to d'Hondt but an obsession with it, even though, as a process, it appears on many occasions to run counter to cross-community consensus.

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

Mr Campbell: I believe that we are moving in the right direction. We need to keep on moving, and, unfortunately, those who were wrong in the past will be proven wrong again.

Mr Agnew: It is important at the start of my speech to say that my comments are very much related to how we appoint the Justice Minister and are not about the individual who happens to be Justice Minister at this time. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Agnew: The Green Party supports the SDLP amendment. As we have made clear all along, we believe that the justice portfolio should be treated like any other. We need to make a decision in this Assembly: do we want normal politics, or do we not? Can we work together, or can we not? Is this a time of peace, or is it not? Are parties in the Assembly fit to govern, or are they not? We heard the DUP leader, the First Minister, say in his party conference speech that we must normalise politics in Northern Ireland. Today, however, he presides over a motion that seeks to keep abnormal politics in the way in which we elect the Justice Minister compared with the way in which we elect every other Minister.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for giving way. What is so normal about d'Hondt? Is that the only mechanism that can deliver power-sharing government?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute added to his time.

Mr Agnew: I appreciate the Member's question because it allows me to clarify our position. It is not that my party and I think that d'Hondt is great, but we oppose appointing every other Minister by d'Hondt and treating the Justice Minister differently. We should have one system. I do not believe that the position of Justice Minister requires any special mechanism.

As I said, it is about normalising politics in Northern Ireland. Why is the current system as it is? It is clear, as we have heard from comments across the Chamber today, that the system is designed to keep "them" out. For each Member, "them" might be somebody different. On the DUP Benches, it might be about keeping Sinn Féin out; on the Sinn Féin Benches, it might be about keeping the DUP out. It is us-and-them politics. Again, I refer to the First Minister's party conference speech, in which he said that we must move beyond us-and-them politics. I absolutely agree, so let us do it. Let us not talk about it; let us do it and appoint the Justice Minister in the same way as we appoint every other Minister.

It is clear what the system is designed to do. I find it strange that the Alliance Party — a party that, since its inception, has campaigned against us-and-them politics and against seeing Northern Ireland as a divided society — now props up a system that, as I say, is designed precisely to keep "them" out.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for giving way again, and I will put the question to him again: how does the d'Hondt mechanism move us beyond us-and-them politics into inclusive, agreed coalition politics, which is the very way in which the Justice Minister is being appointed?

Mr Agnew: The current arrangement has been designed for a particular reason — to keep "them" out. With d'Hondt and the Good Friday Agreement or the St Andrews Agreement

— I do not see a huge difference but whatever — any party that gets a sufficient number of votes can take up positions in the Northern Ireland Government, and that should be the case. If we are ready to move forward into proper democracy in Northern Ireland, we should not constantly tweak the system just to ensure that the people whom we do not want to get certain positions do not get them.

My final point is that, as has been said, there seems to be a certain amount of self-interest in the system, with the DUP and Sinn Féin not wanting their nearest and dearest rivals to take up certain positions. We have seen it with party political donations. We talk about Northern Ireland moving forward and normal politics. We say that there is enough peace for us to pull down the watchtowers, take soldiers off the streets and run democratic institutions, but, because of security risks, we cannot tell the electorate who donates to political parties.

As I said at the start of the debate, the Assembly needs to make a decision. Is politics moving forward? Do we want normal politics? Do we want to work together? If the answer is yes, we need to support the SDLP amendment and change the system whereby we seek to keep "them" out.

11.45 am

Mr McDevitt: I thank all Members who spoke. This is an important debate. We tabled the amendment because it deserved to be aired. We need to hold up a light to let the public see what is really going on: a political deal between a party that could not see a nationalist in power and one that would not have a unionist. That is what is going on. This is an agreement built on self-destructive prejudice. In a compromise to keep this place ticking over, they have had to resort to an agreement that is totally at odds with the will of our people.

I am a republican, and at the very heart of any republican's tenets and philosophy is the principle that sovereignty lies with the people — not here or in any other place, but with the people. They make the big decisions. The last time the people were tested on how we do government around here, on how we pick our Government and on the shape and structures of that Government was when the Good Friday Agreement was put before our people. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McDevitt: The people spoke. The DUP did not win that argument, but I suspect that, as democrats, they accept the outcome of that referendum. The agreement is pretty clear. Paragraph 3 of strand one says:

"The Assembly will exercise full legislative and executive authority in respect of those matters currently within the responsibility of the six Northern Ireland Government Departments, with the possibility of taking on responsibility for other matters as detailed elsewhere in this agreement."

The agreement goes on to tell us, in strand one, that the Executive will be appointed by d'Hondt. Then, in a special separate chapter dealing with policing and justice, the agreement, in paragraph 7, tells us the following:

"The participants also note that the British Government remains ready in principle ... to devolve responsibility for policing and justice issues."

The people of Northern Ireland were asked whether they agreed with that, and they said yes. They did not agree to it being done in any other way.

Mr P Robinson: Yes, they did. We have had elections since then.

Mr McDevitt: No, they did not, because it is not —
[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Member to continue.

Mr McDevitt: An election for a republican is a permission to shape the structures within the framework given by the people. No republican has the right to alter the basic decisions made by the people in a referendum. That is not republicanism; it is a different type of government. It makes me very sad —

Mr M McGuinness: Will the Member give way?

Mr McDevitt: I will.

Mr M McGuinness: Since the Member has flagged the Good Friday Agreement and talked about the will of the people, maybe he will tell us why, during the debate about the transfer of powers on policing and justice, not one of Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, Labour or the Progressive Democrats — all parties that are overwhelmingly representative of the people of the South of Ireland — criticised the agreement made by Peter Robinson and me at Hillsborough. In fact, we were applauded for the agreement that we reached, not just by them but by President Obama and the president of the European Union. Can the Member explain why the SDLP finds itself at odds with all other republicans?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McDevitt: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Mr McGuinness sought to be the president of my nation, and he will know that his first and fundamental duty would have been to uphold Bunreacht na hÉireann: the constitution. He will know that, when a political agreement is reached that affects the institutions of that jurisdiction, it is not the politicians who get the final say, it is the people. I find it regrettable that anyone would depart from that principle. That is the basis on which we should do government around here.

I would like to make a couple of other points. Five of the seven parties represented in the Chamber today said yes to the agreement. Yet, today, we hear that the Alliance Party has become a sort of post-agreement party, one that accepts the agreement in a whole new way that was not what the people were asked to vote on. In the same way, it seems to do post-feminism. In the same way, it says that it is all for equality, unless it requires affirmative action. Well, as the famous feminist philosopher is kind of often known to say: post-feminism will work in a post-patriarchy. Post-agreement politics will work when we do not hear some of the stuff that we heard from the Benches opposite — a sort of unveiled prejudice, an obvious discriminatory tone, a harking back to a bygone era of a lost and long-gone place of majoritarianism.

We can build a new North, but we have to build it on solid foundations. The only solid foundations available to us are those given by the people. If we stay by the people and support the amendment, we will do them and this institution a service.

Mr P Robinson: We have now had two years' experience of devolved responsibility for policing and justice. The historic steps that the Assembly took in 2010 have been justified by that experience. The challenge of the new responsibilities has been fully met.

Last year, the Assembly enacted a major Justice Act, the first time in 40 years that a locally accountable, democratic institution had done so. Significant reforms have been embarked on — for instance, in the field of legal aid — supported by the Executive. A local Justice Minister is now answerable to this House. The Department of Justice is closely scrutinised by the Assembly's Justice Committee. Indeed, the synergies between the work of the DOJ and other Executive Departments such as the Department of Education and the Department for Social Development are being exploited in joined-up policymaking. It is about democratic ownership and democratic accountability for justice and policing powers. It is right that it should continue.

It would have been good to achieve cross-party consensus on the justice arrangements that will apply after May 2012. The Assembly and Executive Review Committee tried to achieve that last autumn. The deputy First Minister and I again tried to bring the parties together in negotiations. After those discussions, we put forward our own proposals, based on what we believed would achieve the widest support, and we then consulted all the parties. None of the other parties made alternative proposals that could command wider consensus than those that we had tabled. That is why the deputy First Minister and I issued the way forward statement on 18 January. In that statement, a package of decisions addressed, first, the immediate future of the justice arrangements with the imminent application of the sunset clause. Secondly, it committed us to action on specific difficulties that the Alliance Party had identified in the current arrangements. Thirdly, it offered a solution to the anomaly in Executive representation created by having a specific arrangement for appointing a Justice Minister side by side with the d'Hondt system for other Executive Ministers. Fourthly, it promised early movement on the review of the operation of the institutions after 2015.

An amendment to the motion has been tabled. It is important that the motion be passed without amendment if the criterion for forestalling the operation of the sunset clause is to be met today. The amendment was not unexpected. Since the deputy First Minister and I first agreed alternative arrangements back in 2008, those who tabled the amendment and their party colleagues have been blinkered in their support for the application of d'Hondt to the appointment of a Justice Minister. Suggesting, as some SDLP Members have, that appointing a Justice Minister by a free vote of the Assembly on the basis of obtaining cross-community support is undemocratic is, frankly, barking mad. It is hard to imagine a more democratic process.

Also, it has to be said that the SDLP seems to have a perverse view of what a mandate is. I notice that there are young people in the Public Gallery today who are watching our proceedings. I would not want any of them to go away with the view that, somehow, democratic mandates ended in 1998 and that a decision taken in 1998 is binding for all time. Mandates come with elections. At each election, the people vote, and the people decide whether there should be changes. The people have had the opportunity to endorse the new proposals that we have put forward, and they have

decided that they should endorse those proposals. That is what a mandate is: an opportunity for people, freely at the ballot box, to make those decisions.

Mr A Maginness: The mandate is there; that is the mandate.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr P Robinson: The Member waves at me a document that was written in a previous millennium. He seems to think that that document is like the law of the Medes and Persians: it changeth not. The electorate is supreme; the electorate decides when there are changes to be made. It is about time that the Member's party recognised what democracy is about and what a mandate really means.

It also has to be said that there is another view. It is one that has little public support and popularity in the community as a whole. However, we have to acknowledge that there is that other view, one that dissents from having policing and justice devolved to the Assembly at all. Admittedly, it is not a sensible or fashionable view, but it is held by a very few representatives throughout Northern Ireland and by less than 1% of our Assembly. The House will not want to waste much time on this matter, but it is worth noting that for years this same source of scaremongering predicted doom if policing and justice powers were devolved. First, he claimed that the DUP was ushering Gerry Kelly into office as Justice Minister. He got that wrong. Then, he alleged that Martin McGuinness would get control of the judiciary. Again, he got that wrong. Next, he asserted that policing and justice would become subject to the North/South ministerial process. Once more, he got it wrong. Then, he declared that Martin McGuinness, rather than the Justice Minister, would appoint members of the Policing Board. Again, he got that wrong. Nobody in the House speaks with less credibility on policing and justice than the dissident Member for North Antrim. Happily, the people of Northern Ireland are comfortable with the process that we have put in place, and, happily, the people of North Antrim put the Member in his box as he squeaked through there on the ninth count on DUP surpluses.

I believe that we have a balanced and workable way forward. We have shown maturity and have made progress on matters that eluded those who went before us. I commend the motion to the House and urge the House to resolve accordingly.

Mr Speaker: Before we proceed to the Question on the amendment, I advise Members that it requires only a simple majority. If the amendment is made, the vote on the motion, as amended, will also require only a simple majority. However, if the amendment falls, the vote on the motion, as it stands on the Order Paper, will require cross-community support in accordance with paragraph 8(2) of schedule 1 to the Northern Ireland Act 2009. I know that this is complex, but I will remind the House as we go through the process. I will now put the Question on the amendment, which requires only a simple majority.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 13; Noes 78.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr A Maginness, Mr P Ramsey, Ms Ritchie.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Byrne and Mr Eastwood.

NOES

Ms M Anderson, Mr S Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr W Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lewis, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Mr P Maskey, Mr Molloy, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Murphy, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Sheehan, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr W Clarke and Mr G Robinson.

The following Member voted in both Lobbies and is therefore not counted in the result: Mr Allister.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr Speaker: I will now put the Question on the motion. This vote requires cross-community support.

Main Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 78; Noes 13.

AYES

NATIONALIST:

Ms M Anderson, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Mr W Clarke, Mr Flanagan, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr P Maskey, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Sheehan.

UNIONIST:

Mr S Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lewis, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

OTHER:

Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr W Clarke and Mr G Robinson.

NOES

NATIONALIST:

Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr A Maginness, Mr P Ramsey.

UNIONIST:

Mr Allister.

OTHER:

Mr Agnew.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Eastwood and Mrs McKeivitt.

Total votes	91	Total Ayes	78	[85.7%]
Nationalist Votes	34	Nationalist Ayes	23	[67.6%]
Unionist Votes	48	Unionist Ayes	47	[97.9%]
Other Votes	9	Other Ayes	8	[88.9%]

Main Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That, pursuant to paragraph 8(1) of schedule 1 to the Northern Ireland Act 2009, the Department of Justice established by the Department of Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 is to continue operating from 1 May 2012.

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately upon the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business after lunchtime will be Question Time.

The sitting was suspended at 12.29 pm.

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

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

Environment

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question 8 has been withdrawn and requires a written answer.

Association of British Insurers

1. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the Minister of the Environment whether, in discussions with the Association of British Insurers, he has raised or will raise the question of why it will not divulge information about profits and losses, as it deems such information to be commercially sensitive. (AQO 1417/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I thank the Member for the question. As I previously indicated to the Assembly, I have two streams of conversation going on with the Association of British Insurers. One relates to further legislative and administrative means in respect of training and post-qualification around novice drivers. The second piece of work, being taken forward with the Law Society of Northern Ireland, the insurers and the Consumer Council, to which I spoke this morning, relates to bearing down on costs. One of those factors is that the insurers will not let the profits and losses for their business be known generally, including here in Northern Ireland. I find that unacceptable. I have no doubt that they have that information, and I believe that it should be shared. Given the higher costs of insurance in the North of Ireland, historically and currently, particularly in rural areas, I believe that it is a matter of public confidence that they share that information.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. Does the Minister agree that access to such data is paramount and that we should address the issue of high insurance premiums and the data across different areas in the North? I think particularly of my area in the north-west, where premiums are incredibly high. Does he agree that we need to look at that?

Mr Attwood: As I indicated in my opening answer, I very much agree. That is why I met the chief executive of the Association of British Insurers in London when, because of the work of the Office of Fair Trading and the subsequent work of the Consumer Council, the matter became more visible and more public in the latter part of last year. A week later, I met his representatives in Belfast. They agreed that they would work with me and others in the two strands of work that I outlined. The purpose is to consider how, if there is a downward trend in overall car insurance premiums in the North, we are going to push it further and how we are going to interrogate the higher premiums in rural areas, in particular, not least in the north-west. I completely concur with all the Member's comments.

Mr Dallat: Does the Minister agree that young people across the North feel absolutely ripped off by insurance

companies? Given his recent research on the issue, are there any proposals that he might make to alleviate the problem for our young people?

Mr Attwood: The purpose of the two streams of work is to bear down on insurance premiums generally, including those for novice drivers. One of my staff in DOE told me recently that, for Christmas, she gave her son a month's insurance on the car. The cost of an annual premium was prohibitive, but the Christmas present to her son was a month's insurance for the car to enable him to improve his driving skills and have a bit more mobility. It is an acute situation.

The first of my two streams of work is to consider whether we can introduce further measures beyond those already agreed by the Executive that might improve driver safety, especially for novice drivers, in a way that will work itself through in insurance premiums. I have not concluded my judgement on those matters, but among the issues that we have to consider is whether novice drivers should have restrictions on those whom they can carry in their vehicle. That is the case in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and other parts of the world, where there are restrictions on novice drivers about whom they can carry and the age of person they can carry because the evidence is that the likelihood of a serious accident escalates if a novice driver has other young people in the car. We have to interrogate all those options, which is what I am doing. That work will be finished in the next four weeks. At the same time, we have to look at all the wider reasons why insurance premiums are higher here, not least whether some insurance companies are profit grabbing and whether there is a lack of competition in the North because of not having enough insurance companies, and any other measures that might lead to reduced premiums for all drivers.

Mr Nesbitt: Will the Minister inform the House whether he ascertained at his meeting with the chief executive of the Association of British Insurers or elsewhere whether the data he seeks has been made available to the devolved Administrations of Wales and Scotland?

Mr Attwood: I did not ask that particular question. However, the fact that a five-month piece of work has been ongoing with the Law Society, the Consumer Council and the association means that that matter will be on the radar and the agenda. To date, the association has not shared the data with us. It has relied on commercial sensitivity. The Office of Fair Trading clearly had access to some level of information that led it to conclude that, over recent years, insurers have not made underwriting profits but have made profits from other work associated with their business. I note the Member's point. It will be on the radar.

Conservation: Hillsborough

2. **Mrs Hale** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline his Department's responsibilities in relation to the conservation of Hillsborough village. (AQO 1418/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for her question. Hillsborough is a very scenic town. I confirm that a large parcel of land in the village is in a conservation area. Ninety-nine buildings in the greater Hillsborough area are listed. There are severe restraints on what can and cannot happen in a neighbourhood, given the outline of PPS 6 in respect of planning, archaeology and our built heritage. The listing of

buildings, the conservation zone and grant aid, when that becomes available, are mechanisms to sustain the unique character of Hillsborough village and its worth.

Mrs Hale: Does the Minister agree that greater emphasis should be placed on restricting vehicular activity to ensure that the environment and built heritage of the conservation area are offered greater protection?

Mr Attwood: I am sure that the Member will agree that the biggest initiative in respect of managing traffic in Hillsborough has been the bypass and the dual carriageway to Newry. I remember going to the national hunt races in the Republic of Ireland with my father when I was a young child. At that stage, you had to go through Hillsborough, Dromore, Banbridge, Poyntzpass and every other village between Belfast and Dublin. So, there has been vehicular intervention to moderate traffic. If there are proposals, those should be raised with the relevant Minister: the Minister for Regional Development. If there are better mechanisms to manage traffic in Hillsborough, I am sure that the Minister and his Department will apply their minds to that.

In respect of DOE responsibility, I have indicated that the village has great history, heritage and listed buildings. A survey of all the listed buildings in the Lisburn City Council area, of which there are over 200, was recently conducted. In the fullness of time, there may be proposals to delist or to list buildings as a result of a second survey of those properties. However, at all times, my Department will be informed by the need to protect the built heritage. That is part of what provides quality of life, not least for the people of Hillsborough, and part of the tourist appeal of Northern Ireland. It is a crucial element for exploiting tourism.

Mr B McCrea: That is all very well, Minister. However, Mrs Hale's point still pertains: a huge amount of traffic, including large articulated lorries, goes through the scenic village of Hillsborough, destroying not only the environment but the quality of life there. We seem to be in a no-win situation. We cannot get the help that such a village deserves. We need somebody to look into the matter, and I ask that you do so.

Mr Attwood: I am the Environment Minister; I am the planning Minister. I may stretch the competency of my office at times, and, at times, I am certainly glad to do so. In fact, there might be some examples of that in very recent times. Nonetheless, I have to respect other Ministers' authority. Responsibility for roads management primarily falls to your party colleague Mr Danny Kennedy. So, I trust that you will raise the matter with him, as I will.

Mr McLaughlin: What funding is available to enhance building facades in conservation areas?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question, which deals with an important issue. The Member knows the quality of the built heritage in the city of Derry/Londonderry. The single biggest asset under state influence on the island of Ireland is the walls of Derry. That is very important. What money is available? Grants are available for relevant categories of listed building. The amount that is available is 35% of building costs and 75% of professional fees. The Member might be aware that the previous Minister reduced the grant aid to £50,000 because of the budgetary situation that, in his view, prevailed in DOE at that time. I have increased the level to £150,000. That has been applicable

in the latter part of the current financial year, and it will be applicable in the next financial year.

Behind the question, there is a significant point of principle and policy; namely whether, if built and natural heritage are part of what contributes to quality of life and makes it worthwhile and are important for tourism, growth and jobs, we will find ways and means to protect, develop and enhance the built heritage, not least in the city of Derry and in anticipation of the year of culture. That is why, last week, I went to Derry at the invitation of my colleague Mr Eastwood. I met a lot of people there to interrogate whether there are potential opportunities in respect of a number of projects around the city in which my Department could help towards preparations for 2013. I hope that I will be able to do so.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question 3 has been withdrawn.

Allotments

4. **Mr W Clarke** asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of how local councils are performing in relation to providing residents with opportunities to avail of allotments. (AQO 1420/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. Provision in respect of allotments is contained in legislation from the old Stormont Parliament — the Allotments Act (Northern Ireland) 1932 — which was amended in 1985. It gives district councils the ability to provide allotments in their area. Since 1985, that has been without the Department's consent. The consequence of that is that, in 2010, 497 allotments were made available through eight councils. By 2012, that had increased to 602 allotments through 11 councils. I welcome that direction of travel. However, it raises the question of why, as we speak, 15 councils in Northern Ireland do not provide allotments. Many councils that have provided allotments in recent years have not been able to provide more than they do already. Carrickfergus is the best example of a council that provides allotments. It provides 189 of the total of 602 allotments.

Therefore, to answer the question on how councils are performing, I will say that there is a mixed record. Some councils have performed for a long time. Three councils have come on board in the past couple of years. Eleven councils still do not provide any allotments at all. The principle of more allotment provision by more councils is one that, I am sure, everyone would endorse.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. I am sure that he agrees that clear health and well-being benefits are associated with allotment provision. However, allotment provision by councils or local authorities is voluntary. Will the Minister consider introducing legislation to make it a statutory duty on councils to provide allotments, which is the situation across the water?

2.15 pm

Mr Attwood: The question is well timed. Given that we are in the process of local government reorganisation, that various pieces of legislation will come before the Assembly over the next 18 months or so, as an answer to a subsequent question will confirm, and that reorganisation will offer opportunities as well as threats and challenges —

I would be neglectful if I did not refer to them — it is timely to consider whether we can, in the context of reorganisation, build further duties for councils into the law for local government. Councils might not forgive me for saying that. Some complain that they will have more responsibilities, such as the high hedges legislation — an order relating to fees will come before the Assembly shortly — but inadequate resources to take on those responsibilities. Councils might make that point in respect of the Member's proposal. Nonetheless, I confirm that I will look at whether there are further mechanisms, including legislative ones, that will build more opportunities for allotments into the life of local councils, especially post RPA.

In the meantime, I will not be a Minister who hides from granting approval to councils when they come to local arrangements with communities on the use of local land. One of my first acts as Minister was to approve proposals from Newry and Mourne District Council to transfer land or buildings to the local community for that community's use. I believe that there are opportunities for local councils to exploit that mechanism. Indeed, my Department wrote to all councils referring to the Newry and Mourne model as one of best practice and so on and so forth. We should use moneys and land assets for greater community benefit. Whether it is —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Time, Minister.

Mr Attwood: Whether for allotments or other interventions, I support them.

Mr Hussey: I should begin by declaring an interest as a councillor and vice-chairman of Omagh District Council. Perhaps the Minister would advise what other opportunities his Department has to open up market gardening in green areas to the public?

Mr Attwood: I have to be mindful that I am the Minister of the Environment but do not run the local councils. Local councils would be quick to advise me about the limits of my competence. Having said that, I have advised councils that, on a wide range of issues, be they to do with sharing or collaboration, the direction of reorganisation or tender practice, I will be encouraging and, maybe, directive when it comes to how they conduct their affairs, which is consistent with my legislative competence. Councils are bodies corporate, and I do not have the authority to impose my will on them, much as I wish it were so at times. My response to Mr Clarke was that the RPA creates the capacity for councils to be more agile in doing new and better things differently. That includes, potentially, their use of community land. I will enable councils to transfer land or property to community organisations, which might involve more favourable rents than the market value, and I will encourage greater general discussion in the Department on community benefits, including, for example, community benefit and social clauses in contracts and renewable planning applications. Subject to all of that, I will stretch the limits of my office.

Mr Byrne: Does the Minister agree that the allotments policy is a worthwhile initiative by district councils? Is the Minister happy that all councils are consistent in how they deal with allotment allocations, and is he considering issuing general guidelines to them?

Mr Attwood: As I said in answer to an earlier question, compared with England, there is the demand for but not

the provision of allotments. The Minister of Finance and Personnel has a long-standing interest in community gardening and allotments, and very good he is at it too, I gather — *[Interruption.]* It is what?

Mr McLaughlin: That is enough digging.

Mr Attwood: Councils need to look at the evidence that I will place in the Assembly Library. It shows that 11 councils do not yet make provision for allotments, and three came on board in recent years. However, there has not been a great increase in the number of allotments being made available. I appreciate that there might be logistical issues with the ownership of land and so on, but the figures are quite stark and provide a challenge to all the councils that have not yet come on board. When will they do so?

Mr Agnew: The issue across the region and in my constituency in the — you will pardon the pun — patchy provision of allotments is a lack of political will rather than a lack of available space. North Down is blessed with plenty of good parkland and green space.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question.

Mr Agnew: What work can NILGA do to promote the good practice that exists in some councils to try to bring other councils on board?

Mr Attwood: On the one hand, NILGA, the National Association of Councillors, SOLACE and all the other management and councillor representative organisations have a responsibility to encourage the better use of allotments. However, it seems to me that quite a number of Members in the Chamber are still double-jobbing. There are at least 30 of them. None of those Members is sitting behind me, and, after his decision, Mr Clarke will not be among them in the near future. It falls to the 30 Members who are double-jobbing to take back the message from the Assembly that Mr Agnew has just articulated: what are councillors who are also MLAs doing to ensure that there are more allotments in the councils that currently provide them — if that is possible — and what are councils that do not provide allotments going to do? I will work with councillors, MLAs and representative bodies to get more allotments over the line.

Local Government Reform

5. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister of the Environment what legislation he intends to introduce in this calendar year on the reorganisation of local government. (AQO 1421/11-15)

9. **Mr Douglas** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the steps that need to be taken to progress the review of public administration. (AQO 1425/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I thank the Minister for his question. *[Interruption.]* Sorry. I hear that there is a reshuffle coming, so you might be lucky yet.

Ms S Ramsey: Is that in your party?

Mr Attwood: I am sure that there could be one in my party as well.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, may I take this question with question 9 from Mr Sammy Douglas? I do not intend to go through all the history and rehearse my party's view and

my view, as a Minister, on local government reorganisation. However, I have said — I said it at the NILGA conference last week — that I am a believer in fundamental reform of the North of Ireland. I believe that reform has served us well, even though it was difficult and there was resistance. I also believe that we need a new phase of reform that will include local government. I may have a view on how local government should be shaped and how many councils there should be, but I do not deny or in any way discount the need for fundamental reform.

In taking forward and managing that process, a draft local government boundaries order will be laid before the Assembly in the near future. That will outline the shape of the 11 new councils, and, because it will be subject to the affirmative procedure, it will be a matter for discussion in Committee and in the House. It may be that parties, councils and others will have views on what local government boundaries should look like beyond those tabled in that order. A Local Government (Reorganisation) Bill will be tabled in the autumn that will put into law the transition from 26 councils to 11 councils. That Bill will also create statutory transition committees; embed ethical standards regimes in the new councils; empower councils, in the event of RPA, with community planning and well-being powers; and so on and so forth. It will be extensive legislation and, because the Executive have agreed, it will also ban double-jobbing from 2015. There will also be a suite of subordinate legislation, but I will not go into that at this time.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's response. I have been called many things, but never "Minister". Will the Minister ensure that the Committee is given the proper time to scrutinise that legislation? Towards the end of the previous mandate, the Committee found that the scrutiny of Bills was rushed through. Will you please afford the Committee that time?

Mr Attwood: I absolutely will afford the Committee and the Assembly the time to interrogate this. It is, as I keep saying, a once in a political lifetime opportunity to remodel local government in a better image. That is clearly desirable and needed, even if we may fight about some fundamental issues of detail. There will be adequate time. However, we also need to be mindful that we do not have for ever. Although the RPA issue may have gone on in perpetuity, we now have a deadline for shadow council elections in May 2014, with the councils going fully live in May 2015 or thereabouts. Therefore, while that provides more than adequate time to get all the legislative and policy issues dealt with — there are big issues, not least around questions of assets and liabilities, human resources and all the rest — we need to apply our minds to get this over the line, if that is the will of the Assembly, in due course.

Mr Douglas: In light of the Minister's speech to NILGA last week, will he confirm that when people voted in 2011 they elected councillors for a four-year term and that those councillors will remain, regardless of whether they hold an alternative mandate, as representatives for the entirety of the term?

Mr Attwood: Yes, I am pleased to confirm that because this is a hybrid situation that could end up in a bit of a muddle. If councillors who are elected in shadow form in May 2014 are MLAs at that time, they will be entitled to continue as MLAs and councillors until May 2015, when the double-jobbing ban

will kick in. That is because the shadow councils, as of May 2014, are only shadow and do not have full legal authority until a year later. The hybrid situation will continue until then.

Nevertheless, while I have not raised the issue at Executive level, I may yet be minded to put into the Local Government (Reorganisation) Bill, as part of the double-jobbing ban, the capacity to commence that section of the Act earlier than 2014. If we are to deal with double-jobbing in principle and in law, it falls to political parties to deal with it in policy and in practice and to do so when the situation arises and to encourage that direction of travel. That is why, as of April this year, MLAs who remain as councillors or councillors who are Members of the House of Commons or the House of Lords will have their council allowances, including special responsibility allowances, reduced by two thirds. I think that those are the right principles and that that is the right practice, and I hope that all parties will endorse and act on them.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for his interesting responses so far. Will the Minister provide an update on the findings of the policy panels, which looked into RPA in the previous mandate, and whether their work will be carried through?

Mr Attwood: Yes, we will provide the Committee for the Environment with further details on the work of the policy panels, and, yes, their work will be carried through. That is why I have written to all the councils, encouraging them and asking that the voluntary transition committees are now re-established in order to take forward all the strands of work that were initiated a number of years ago. Very good work was done, indeed. In addition, a regional transition committee, chaired by me and with representatives of each transition committee, will be established in order to show political leadership and to ensure consistency of practice as we take forward the difficult and different strands of work. Eventually, all that work will be captured by statutory transition committees when the Local Government (Reorganisation) Bill becomes law. A further phase of work will be taken forward by the statutory transition committees in the run down to the councils going live in 2015.

2.30 pm

Finance and Personnel

Government Assets

1. **Mr Byrne** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much of the £842 million expected from the sale of assets has been realised. (AQO 1431/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel):

Before I answer the question, I will, as I seem to have to do regularly in the Chamber, correct an SDLP Member on a question that they have asked. I want to correct the Member on two points. First, the amount of additional revenue that the Executive had planned to raise over the Budget period was not £842 million; it was £900 million. Secondly, the £900 million did not refer purely to asset sales. It also referred to other revenue-raising measures, such as the increase in the regional rate to allow for inflation, the plastic bag levy and additional finance from the housing associations and Belfast port.

As I explained yesterday in the Budget debate, since we are less than one year into the Budget, it is too early to draw conclusions on the delivery of capital receipts. Around £600 million worth of capital receipts are planned in the Budget, many of which have been built into the departmental figures and will be up to the Departments to deliver. The one thing that I can say is that, to date, we have not had any indications from Departments that the capital receipts that they had put into their budgets — apart from one or two minor ones — have not been realised.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his answer, and I note the figures that he has used. Are we still on track to try to realise all the proceeds over the mandate, and if not, will any capital projects be put in jeopardy?

Mr Wilson: We are not planning for failure. The SDLP seems to love the prospect of failure and plans for it all the time. Indeed, it seems to eulogise failure. We are not planning for any failure at all on this. Departments have made commitments, and their budgets are predicated on delivering certain capital receipts. I have drawn to the attention of the Assembly already that, at present, the only one on which we have fallen behind somewhat has been the £100 million that is to be realised by the assets management unit. This year, £1.5 million out of £10 million has been realised. We are building in the possibility that £8.5 million will have to be carried over to next year. Of course, that does not mean that the money has been lost. It simply means that those receipts will have to be realised next year rather than this year, and we have been able to deal with that pressure in the monitoring rounds.

Mr Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister accept that, given that we are in an extremely difficult investment environment, the Executive should also be mindful of the opportunities to release land through lease or means other than asset disposal and sale? That could assist in developing employment opportunities and, in doing so, could meet some of the Programme for Government targets.

Mr Wilson: As the Member will know, the asset management unit has still got work to do in looking at all the possibilities regarding surplus assets. It will look at what assets we have and at what revenue we can raise from those. If possibilities come along where, rather than selling the asset at the bottom of the market, it can be leased to raise money in that way, all those kinds of things should be looked at by Departments. This year, we had £141.9 million worth of receipts. The only ones that have informed me that they have not realised that are the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), where £2 million from a sale has not been realised, and the Assembly Commission, where £1.4 million that was hoped to be raised from the sale of assets has not been realised either.

Mr Hilditch: Minister, you mentioned Belfast port. What progress has been made on planned receipts from the port?

Mr Wilson: The planned receipts from the port were £20 million in each of the past two years of the current Budget period. That will require some legislation, and the Department for Regional Development (DRD) is working on that. Indeed, regular updates are brought to the Budget review group.

Businesses: Tax Liabilities

2. **Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline any discussions he has had with HM Revenue and Customs about its approach to recovering outstanding tax liabilities from businesses in Northern Ireland. (AQO 1432/11-15)

Mr Wilson: By way of background: I received a number of representations from local businesses in recent months regarding the approach of HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) in recovering debt. The suggestions were that HMRC had hardened its attitude. I also had a meeting with the insolvency practitioners who indicated that they, too, were concerned about the number of insolvencies that resulted from petitions from HMRC. I had a meeting with the Exchequer Secretary, David Gauke, who arranged a meeting for me with the director of debt management and banking in HMRC. I was given assurances that there had been no change in policy. However, I pointed out to him the evidence on the ground, and as a result of that meeting, we will now have closer liaison with HMRC on those issues. We will, hopefully, get early warning of any changes, and where we believe that unfair or harsh decisions have been made by HMRC, we will have direct contact with it to draw those cases to its attention.

Miss M McIlveen: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he outline the number of bankruptcies and company liquidations petitioned locally by HMRC?

Mr Wilson: The worrying thing has been that, over each of the past four years, on average, 55% of petitions that have led to bankruptcies for companies in Northern Ireland have been brought forward by HMRC. Hence, I believed that it was necessary to have the conversation that I did and to look at what might be done to ensure that we had direct links into HMRC. I do not want to discuss the business of individual companies in the Assembly, but I have had a number of cases where, quite clearly, businesses had short-term liquidity difficulties that were made even more difficult by decisions made by HMRC not to allow time to pay.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. What is the Minister's approach to recovering outstanding rates liabilities from businesses in Northern Ireland in the present economic situation?

Mr Wilson: There probably is a bit of leeway there, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, but I am quite happy to outline the approach that we, in the Department, and Land and Property Services have taken. As far as we are concerned, we have a duty to collect debts. I do not know whether the Member wants me to take a more lenient or a more robust approach to this, but members of the SDLP usually highlight the amount of outstanding rates debt.

This Assembly cannot have it both ways. If we wish to pursue rigorously the level of debt, it will mean that we pursue individuals and companies to the point where we take them to court and perhaps even drive them towards a situation in the way that I have just described HMRC doing. If we take a very lenient attitude, debt will increase. We tried to take a very balanced approach in so far as we have sought to work with companies and individuals who have run up debts because they are unable to pay their rates. We give them every opportunity, and we try to make arrangements with them. One of the difficulties is that they do not come

quickly enough to talk about their problems. However, ultimately, given that we do not want to send out a signal that you can simply decide not to pay a legitimate debt that you have incurred as a result of owning property, where we find that people are not co-operating, we will have to pursue it to court.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Is the Minister in a position to state how much large multiple retail stores, for example, pay to the revenue authorities for their operations here in the North?

Mr Wilson: I do my best to prepare for these question sessions, and I have a big black book with answers in it that, at times, makes me appear more intelligent than maybe I am. I am afraid that I do not have the detail that the Member has asked for in my big black book and, therefore, I cannot give him an answer. However, I will endeavour to find out the answer for him.

Mr B McCrea: I do not know whether this is in the big black book either, Sammy, but do you have any data comparing the level of business tax arrears in Northern Ireland with that in the rest of the United Kingdom?

Mr Wilson: I raised that with HMRC officials, who told me that about the same level of debt recovery through court action pertains in the rest of the United Kingdom as pertains here. Indeed, they indicated to me that they had similar discussions with the Scottish Minister recently, and were able to say that the same approach was being used in Scotland.

Government: Consultants

3. **Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in light of the decreased spend on external consultants in 2011-12, how he plans to reduce their use further in the future. (AQO 1433/11-15)

14. **Mr G Kelly** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he has plans to reduce further the use of external consultants by the Civil Service. (AQO 1444/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I will take question 3 along with question 14, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.

The total spend on external consultancy across Departments was less than £16 million. That is a reduction of £56 million from the level that was reported in 2007-8. Of course, the Executive are committed to reducing the amount of spend on consultants by 10% per year. Last year, the reduction was actually 39%. We have proposed to do that in a number of ways. The first is by setting the target. The second is by requiring that any consultancy spend above £10,000 has to be approved by Ministers. What that has done to the number of applications that have been made is significant. Thirdly, Ministers can lower that threshold within their Departments if they see fit.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Does he ever foresee a day when we could do without consultants full stop? Does he envisage that that day could be sometime in the future?

Mr Wilson: It has to be borne in mind that we will always require some consultancy in any public body. First of all, there will be occasions when the expertise does not

reside within a Department. Secondly, it may be a one-off piece of work, in which case there is no point in bringing in the expertise and employing someone full time in the Department, because that expertise will never be used again, so you would be tying up resources. We try to get consultancy spend down as much as possible. Indeed, in some consultancy contracts, when we know that we are going to require the same kind of information or the same skills again, we actually build into the contract a requirement for the consultants to train people within Departments so that we do not have to go back to the same consultants again. However, I do not envisage a situation in which we do not have any consultants.

I have just been passed a note. I thought that I had said a 56% reduction, but it seems that I said it was a £56 million reduction. It is a 56% reduction. If I got that wrong, I want to put it on the record.

Mr Nesbitt: Is the Minister confident that he has maximised the potential for shared working in that area with the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB)?

Mr Wilson: The Special EU Programmes Body extensively uses consultants. Indeed, almost on a weekly basis, I query consultancy spend by the SEUPB. It would appear that much of that consultancy spend is a result of requirements that are laid down by Europe itself. When it comes to particular projects, they need to do economic assessments on them, etc. I do not have the figure off the top of my head. If I had known that the Member was likely to ask the question, I would have loved to put the figure into the public domain. It is too high. I am told that it is high because of requirements that are laid down by the funding body, namely the European Union. Sometimes I think that the SEUPB must be a consultancy dream when it comes to spend.

Mr McNarry: Following on from David McIlveen's supplementary question, does the Minister think it may be necessary to review Civil Service and public service job descriptions to perhaps include qualifications that might have heretofore been lacking? Improving on that might reduce the need for consultants.

2.45 pm

Mr Wilson: As I said in an earlier answer, when we see the need for a consultant and we think we will need that expertise again, we ask the consultant to train our own staff to build up the kind of skill set that the Member is talking about. We also look around Departments. It may be that a Department has done some work, and there is liaison between finance officers and that Department. If that Department has brought in consultants who have done some work, and there has been learning, that knowledge can be transferred and used by another Department, rather than bringing in consultants. I think that, in those ways, we will drive the figures down. Of course, if we know that we are going to do certain pieces of work, and there are vacancies, why not put that into the job description as the Member has suggested?

Ms S Ramsey: I take this opportunity to welcome the work that the Minister has been involved in. It is a good-news story that we are targeting overspend on consultants. A 56% reduction is nothing to be sneezed at. You probably do not have the figures here, Minister —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question.

Ms S Ramsey: Can you give us a breakdown to see where the 56% reduction cuts across all the Departments?

Mr Wilson: As far as I can remember, there may have been a written answer to a Member about the reduction across Departments. The first thing to say is that it is not even across Departments, but I cannot think of any Department where we have not seen a reduction. Some have been more successful than others.

Public Sector Jobs

4. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline his Department's strategy for the decentralisation of public sector jobs. (AQO 1434/11-15)

Mr Wilson: There is no central programme or strategy for the decentralisation of public sector jobs. Individual Departments, of course, can look at the distribution of their staff, where they are employed, and will make decisions about location on the basis of business need, value for money and affordability.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister will know that in the interests of balanced economic development, I favour greater decentralisation to towns like Omagh and Strabane. I ask the Minister to provide an update, in the meantime, on the promotion of home and remote working options for civil servants who travel in excess of 50 miles a day to their place of work. I am not referring to myself.

Mr Wilson: Departments use flexibility in deciding where to locate workers and what working practices they use. Hot-desking, the better use of resources, different office layouts, etc, have all been ways in which we have reduced the amount of money spent on the estate. Indeed, this year, my Department has reduced the budget for the cost of the Civil Service estate by, I think, nearly £2 million as a result of making better use of those resources. When individuals make applications to work from home, if possible, I am sure that each Department will make a judgement on the basis of whether it offers value for money and whether it means that the Department's work can be properly carried out. I do not have figures on how many people are engaged in that kind of activity.

Mr Humphrey: The Minister will be aware that north Belfast has many wards that score high in deprivation indices. I ask the Minister whether any Departments are considering relocation to parts of Belfast other than the city centre, or, indeed, to other parts of Northern Ireland.

Mr Wilson: Of a total of 217,000 jobs in the public sector, 71,000 are located in Belfast, which indicates that there is a fair number of public sector jobs already in the city. To be frank, I am not so sure that people cannot travel from north Belfast into the city centre. If we get to the point where we indulge people to the extent that they have a job at the end of their street, rather than have to do a bit of travelling, we really could not sustain that.

Mr Eastwood: I am sure that the Minister will say that I am painting a very gloomy economic picture, but anyway, I will give it a go. Given the very high levels of unemployment in my constituency, will the Minister tell me how many jobs he or any of his Executive colleagues have decentralised to Derry?

Mr Wilson: I assume that the Member is speaking about Londonderry. We have no plans to decentralise jobs. As I said, the Executive are not pursuing a central strategy. It is being done on the basis of where Departments see opportunities and take decisions based on affordability and value for money. I do not think that any Member would be prepared to defend a decision by any Minister whereby jobs were relocated simply on the basis that it might help employment in a Member's constituency, if such a decision were to cost a fortune and not make sense in a time of economic austerity.

Mr Allister: Will the Minister inform the House whether his Department has oversight of or control powers for the redistribution of public sector jobs by other Departments, bearing in mind the cost that is often involved? If his Department has such oversight, will he take on board concerns about the Department of Education and the Education and Skills Authority, which are that plans are being prepared to transfer jobs out of Rathgael House but not transfer the corresponding jobs that are in Londonderry?

Mr Wilson: Such a relocation would involve capital expenditure, so a business case would have to be submitted to the Department of Finance and Personnel, and value for money for the proposed project would have to be shown. From that point of view, when Departments make such decisions, they have to justify them and show that money is being spent in a way that gives value for money.

DFP: Cost of Division

5. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of his Department's performance in tackling the cost of division. (AQO 1435/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The nature of the work that is progressed by my Department is largely in support of other Departments and, as such, does not give direct exposure to the policies that cut across the cost of division. As I have said in the Assembly on many previous occasions, as Finance Minister, I urge Ministers to make best use of resources. As I said in response to the previous question, especially at this time, we expect Departments, whether in relation to jobs relocation or the delivery of services, to ensure that costs are reduced. If that reflected a reduction in the cost of division, it would be important.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Minister for his answer. I understand his point that the issue is not a direct concern of his Department. However, in his role of encouraging Departments, and in light of the Deloitte report from five years ago that identified £1 billion of potential savings, does he feel that any Department or the Government have made serious inroads into reducing that figure?

Mr Wilson: The Programme for Government refers to the building of a strong and shared community being a requirement and a priority. The Member and the Alliance Party in general are keen to quote this Deloitte report. Maybe I can hammer the myth that the £1.5 billion is all about the cost of division. In fact, the Deloitte report did not, and was not able to, attribute that solely to the cost of division. The report compared the cost of providing services in Northern Ireland with other parts of the United Kingdom and came up with a difference of £1.5 billion. In some cases, that reflected different levels of deprivation

and poverty as well as other factors. It was not, and could not be, purely attributed to the cost of division, although I think that Members of the Alliance Party like to add that in because it makes their case for them.

Mr McQuillan: As part of the Budget review, will the Minister consider allocating more funds to this area?

Mr Wilson: It is up to individual Ministers to decide how Departments spend their money. The whole point of the Budget review is to look at the allocations made to Departments, look at why some have overspent while others have had additional demands for finance and to try to match the money allocated in the past with future needs.

Mrs Overend: Will the Minister provide details of how Peace III funding has benefitted communities and reduced the costs of division?

Mr Wilson: The whole point of Peace III funding is that it was designed to get people to work in co-operation. Indeed, there is meant to be a cross-community element with Peace III funding. However, I have to say that when I see some of the projects that Peace III funding has gone to, I wonder whether it has actually exacerbated the costs of division rather than reduced them.

Titanic Quarter: Public Sector Projects

6. **Ms J McCann** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many public sector projects are located in the Titanic Quarter, Belfast. (AQO 1436/11-15)

Mr Wilson: My Department is not directly involved in any public sector projects located in the Titanic Quarter and does not hold this information in relation to projects funded by other Departments.

Ms J McCann: I thank the Minister for his short answer. However, he will be aware of the social and economic benefits that such projects bring to an area as regards regeneration. Given that west Belfast is the most deprived and disadvantaged area, economically and socially, across the North, will the Minister ensure that he says to his Executive colleagues that any public sector projects will be located in west Belfast?

Mr Wilson: I will give the same answer that I gave to the Member for North Belfast. Belfast is a fairly compact city. When talking about the costs of division, sometimes the best way of reducing such costs is to get people out of the areas in which they have traditionally lived and help them to see that there is actually life beyond those areas and stop the so-called ghettoisation. If we can provide jobs that are accessible to all — and that is the important thing — and that are open to all on the basis of merit, then that is what we should be looking for, rather than simply saying that jobs should go to this or that part of the city.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Mr Moutray is not in his place. I call Karen McKeivitt.

Mrs McKeivitt: Sorry, Mr Chairman I was not concentrating. What action is the Minister taking to ensure —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Can we have just the number?

Asset Management Unit: Land and Property Services

8. **Mrs McKeivitt** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the role of Land and Property Services in assisting the asset management unit. (AQO 1438/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Land and Property Services (LPS) has developed a very effective and constructive working relationship with the asset management unit (AMU) since the latter was set up in September 2011. There is daily contact on a range of issues with the current focus on LPS providing new and updated valuations of all property assets identified by Departments for likely disposal within the current CSR period. This work will feed in to the upcoming AMU report to the Budget review group.

Mrs McKeivitt: Thank you, Principal Deputy Speaker, and I apologise as I was reading something different.

What action is the Minister taking to ensure that LPS valuations are realistic and market compliant?

Mr Wilson: The purpose of having the valuations done is to make sure that they do reflect market values. Where it is felt that valuations are too high, people can have recourse to having them looked at again. They are a guide for Departments when it comes to selling particular assets. I am sure that valuations are done on a fair and professional basis.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That concludes questions to the Minister.

Executive Committee Business

Rates (Amendment) Bill: Royal Assent

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Before we move on to the ministerial statement, I wish to advise the House that the Rates (Amendment) Bill received Royal Assent. The Rates (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2012 became law today, 28 February 2012.

Ministerial Statement

Article 31 Planning Applications and Decisions

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): Copies of my statement were circulated earlier this afternoon and were in Members' pigeonholes on the second floor.

3.00 pm

As Members will be aware, the planning applications for the most significant development proposals in Northern Ireland are designated major applications under article 31 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991. As Minister of the Environment, the final decision to approve or refuse those applications rests with me. The planning system is, of course, far greater than the article 31 applications, but the management of those applications gives an insight to how planning works — whether it works well or not so well.

Those article 31 applications relate to retail, leisure and mixed-use developments and other commercial and industrial projects that have the potential to generate significant investment in the local economy and create much needed jobs in these difficult economic conditions. Consequently, their impact may be greater, and symbolism is higher than may be the case for other categories of application.

There were 55 article 31 applications in the system at the start of this year. In January this year, I was able to dispose of five of them, including approving three: the redevelopment of Ravenhill rugby ground; a new cemetery and crematorium at Moira; and a major hotel proposal in Lisburn. However, I was concerned that, overall, there had been a lack of progress in dealing with those applications. Therefore, I intend to accelerate the process in order to unlock the economic potential in all the proposals that are capable of being approved.

I said in January that I hoped to decide on seven or eight applications in February, and as the month edges to its end, that remains my ambition. If that is realised, one quarter of all article 31 applications that were live at the beginning of January will have been concluded in the past two months. The ambition to have two thirds or three quarters of article 31 applications concluded by the end of June can, in my view, be realised.

Last week, I signalled my intention to grant approval to the proposed Bushmills dunes golf resort and spa at Runkerry — a £100 million development proposal that is expected to create 360 jobs. That decision demonstrates the demanding nature of those proposals where there are factors for and against them; factors that are often viewed as not being capable of reconciliation.

In making my decision on Runkerry, I had to carefully balance the environmental aspects of the proposal — the setting of the world heritage site, the area of outstanding natural beauty and the protection of local landscape and wildlife — against the boost to tourism and the local economy. In arriving at a decision to approve the application, and to ensure that the environment has been properly acknowledged, my decision will be accompanied by stringent conditions that will mitigate the impacts — I accept that there will be impacts — of the development on the sensitive local environment.

I believe that the built and natural heritage designations and appeal of the Causeway Coast, including the wonderful stones, have been recognised and, as fully as my judgement allows, reconciled with the exceptional wider circumstances that led to my decision. I believe that this particular decision is about the wider needs of the Causeway Coast signature project — the Causeway Coast being arguably our single greatest natural and heritage asset — as well as the particular needs of our golf product, balanced with and in a new equilibrium with the built and natural heritage.

Runkerry is part of the process that I have initiated and, in the coming weeks and months, officials will be bringing recommendations on more article 31 applications for my consideration. Since becoming Minister, I have monitored article 31 planning applications with officials on a monthly basis and will continue to do so in order to drive the process forward. Indeed, I had the latest such monthly gathering with all the relevant senior planning officials yesterday to drive the process forward. I will also be seeking an early view from officials on new article 31 applications, of which there are not many, to give a clear steer on how they should be progressed, and in doing so, I have honoured the needs of good process, good evidence and the limits of competence of my office.

I am conscious that a large proportion of article 31 applications relate to retail proposals or mixed-use, retail-led schemes, some of which are in direct competition with others. The situation in Derry is a case in point. There are currently nine retail applications, and officials are finalising an up-to-date analysis of the capacity of the retail catchment for the city to determine how, if at all, to accommodate further retail development. I expect to be able to start dealing with those applications very soon, but I have insisted on a robust retail impact analysis that will allow all proposals to be properly assessed.

There are four similar retail proposals in Magherafelt, four in Newtownards and two in Newry, as well as the long-running John Lewis proposal at Sprucefield. I anticipate that, following the processing of further environmental information in line with current legal requirements, my officials will be in a position to ask the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) to resume the public inquiry into the John Lewis proposal at Sprucefield in the near future.

The planning applications under article 31 include a number involving the processing of waste, including energy production from waste. Such proposals can be controversial, and they have required very careful consideration and analysis and raised many competing issues. When assessing those applications, I will adopt the same diligent approach that I took when considering the Runkerry proposal to ensure the correct balance between the need for the project and the protection of the environment.

The process does not rely solely on the actions of my Department. I urge applicants to provide the Department with any additional information that has been requested as quickly as possible to allow applications to be progressed. The Department of the Environment (DOE) and I are about creating a better place to live, work and invest. I am determined that applications should not become stuck in the system, as previously happened. If applicants cannot respond to such requests, my officials or I will determine applications on the basis of current information.

I want to make it very clear to consultees and Ministers responsible for Departments with which the Planning Service consults that delay by the DOE or consultees and doubts of Departments or consultees about PADs and the response to applications is not what we need, and it must not continue. Statutory timelines for consultees will be introduced to rectify that.

In the first six months of 2012, there will be a gear change in planning: decisions will be made; there will be certainty for all; and planning will be a key tool in economic progress and creating jobs in time of need. We need to deliver improved public services and make sure that planning makes a real difference to the physical, social and economic development of the North, while protecting the best of the built and natural heritage. That is the standard by which I wish to be judged and judge myself. To do so, and to embed accountability in the planning system, the DOE and the Minister's office, I intend to report to the Assembly at least two or three times a year by way of an oral statement.

I do not set up this new process casually. My new senior management team in the Planning Service bring a freshness, rigour and application to the management of article 31 applications. I believe that setting strong targets for decisions can be achieved, in part because I have a sense of what the team can achieve. I accept that the new order of things has to cascade into divisional offices where practice and performance can be enhanced. That is a further phase of what needs to be done, and I intend that it shall be.

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment):

I welcome the Minister's statement and the fact that he is making a proactive effort to unlock the economic potential of article 31 planning applications. I am very pleased that the Minister recognises that most of the large planning decisions are not straightforward. They require careful balancing, often to protect the environment. Therefore, I welcome the fact that his decision on Runkerry will be accompanied by stringent conditions to protect the area's landscape and features. Will the Minister back that up by giving a commitment to the House today that his planning enforcement unit will be adequately resourced to ensure that those stringent conditions are adhered to at all times over the coming years?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Chair of the Committee for the Environment for her remarks. I endorse all of what she said about being proactive, the potential of article 31 applications and the fact that they are not straightforward. Although, in my view, exceptional circumstances allowed the Runkerry proposal to proceed, it will be accompanied by 19 planning conditions, some of which are groundbreaking in their protection of the natural heritage and environment. In advance of any development, there are requirements relating to when you can build and to environmental management, even to the extent of whether external floodlights can be used in the golf academy. In my view and where the approval of that application is concerned, all those demonstrate a particular rigour on the part of DOE and its advisers.

The Member made a very valid point. We cannot, on the one hand, have a fit-for-purpose planning system but, on the other, not have fit-for-purpose enforcement, whether that is on the planning or the environmental side. I have said before in the House that I think that the model of the Department's environmental crime unit should be more

widely deployed. It captures issues of not just environmental enforcement but planning enforcement. The number of staff in the environmental crime unit is about to be increased by 11. However, in my view, and I have made this clear to the permanent secretary, even that increased staff of 34 will not be adequate for the environmental crime challenge that we face.

We need to have partners in that approach, not least judges and magistrates who impose penalties. Some time ago, there was a case in a seaside town in Northern Ireland where a listed building that was in a very prominent place and part of a very prominent terrace was knocked down. The fine imposed was £250. There may well have been reasons why the judge in that case — a magistrate — was minded to go in that direction, but, from this distance, that sort of outcome raises questions. The same applies to planning enforcement. In that regard, I endorse the sentiment of what the Member said.

Since I became Minister, I have tried to demonstrate to those who are, in my view, the worst offenders that people will be made to live up to their obligations, whether those are planning or environmental. I find it quite intolerable that some developers in Northern Ireland who have the money and resources to develop and who are actively developing apply pressure on the Department to grant planning permissions while allowing neighbouring sites that they are developing to go to rack and ruin. Whatever about planning enforcement, developers and those who have control and custody of development sites have obligations that they need to face up to.

Mr Storey: I welcome the Minister's statement and the fact that he referred to consultees. I also welcome his decision on the Runkerry development. Will he give an assurance to the House that a consultee in his own Department, namely the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), will be brought under the same rigorous timeline for responding to applications?

The Minister is aware of a particular ongoing problem in Clough Mills in my constituency, where a difficulty rests in differences between the NIEA and the Planning Service in that conflicting, contradictory messages are being sent.

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question and for his support for the decision that was taken on the Runkerry development.

If I cannot put my own house in order, I do not have much authority to tell others to get theirs in order. I have made it clear to the various sections of my Department that they have obligations to respond in good time and to maintain consistency with the memorandums of understanding that exist between consultees and the Planning Service. I hope that everyone listening will have heard my endorsement of the sentiments and substance of Mr Storey's question on that matter.

However, whether they are in my Department or other Departments — there may be worse offenders than the NIEA, which is Mr Storey's view — memorandums of understanding, encouragement and ministerial leadership go only so far. Ultimately, we must have statutory timelines for responses to consultation, whereby the law would require responses within a stated number of weeks. Until we have that, we will be fighting with one hand tied behind our back.

That should not make any difference to any statutory consultee. In the circumstances that we face, it seems to me that, just as I have said that it is time to get decisions out, it is the responsibility of those who are in control and command of Departments or other statutory consultees to ensure that they impose that same discipline on the organisations that they are responsible for.

3.15 pm

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's statement. A lot of people are happy that decisions are being made. What has been the change? Have you changed the ways in which you deal with the statutory consultees, or have you changed management practices?

Mr Attwood: There is the beginning of a change; even I would concede that it is the beginning of a change. We have to demonstrate between now and June that that change is deeply embedded by fulfilling the ambition to have two thirds or three quarters of all the current article 31 applications addressed in whatever way they should be addressed — by being withdrawn, approved or refused. Given that it may yet be the case that, by the end of business tomorrow, another seven or eight applications will have been addressed, in two months a quarter of the applications will have been decided on one way or the other. That will be a good signpost for the future.

Why has the change come about? There are a number of reasons. As I indicated in my statement, there is a new senior management team. Although I acknowledge the work of the previous senior management team, as I indicated in my statement, the new senior management team brings a freshness, a rigour and a new application to the management of those projects. I acknowledge that, for all the comments that I and others make about the planning system, the directness, determination and application of the new senior management team, without naming them, is beginning to produce results.

I would like to think that the fact that I actively manage the applications on a month-to-month basis is a factor. We sit down to assess the applications, and the meetings are not short. Yesterday's meeting began at 12.10 pm and finished at 6.45 pm because of various interruptions and other ministerial duties. The three members of staff who were present at that meeting stayed in this Building until the meeting concluded, even though it ate into a big part of their day. That demonstrates that they are committed.

There is a need for decisive judgement in some of these matters: it is time to bring them to a conclusion. In all of the toing and froing that may go on in respect of each and every application, there is a time to call it. As I demonstrated in Runkerry, it was time to call it, even though the call was not in sympathy with all those who have an interest in and a concern about the Runkerry development. If there is a changed regime — as I said, I will be judged by results, although the indications are encouraging — it is because that child has many parents. I acknowledge all those who contributed to the start of a changed regime.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his statement and congratulate him on trying to get things moving and get matters and jobs in place. It was particularly good to hear that the enforcement system will be getting better.

I am in a quandary about whether to ask questions about issues on my patch or Runkerry. I will stick to Runkerry for my colleague Robin Swann. Will the Minister ensure that the local infrastructure that needs to go with the development, such as cycle paths, rambling routes and all the other ways of getting to the resort, is properly put in place so that the other stakeholders, particularly the environmentalists, are continually kept on board so that we get the excellent resort that we want to see for the benefit of the whole of Northern Ireland?

Mr Attwood: Yes, I can give that reassurance. I will explain the fundamentals of the Runkerry decision. It was not a decision primarily about whether there should be another golf course on the north coast, which is blessed with golf courses. Indeed, the north coast, stretching to Donegal, is blessed with a multitude of the best courses in the world.

It was a decision, in the first place, about the Causeway signature project. It was a decision informed by the fact that all the land in the Causeway signature project stretching from Ballycastle right across to Magilligan is, arguably, our single biggest asset when it comes to the quality of our lives and the opportunity for tourism on the built and natural side. Certainly, people in that neck of the woods will agree with that.

I keep saying that there is a better concentration of built and natural assets in the North of Ireland and on the north coast than anywhere in these islands. That is no exaggeration. Therefore, mindful of the scale of the wonder and beauty of all that, and the environmental needs of all that, there is also a need to try to build infrastructure, which is the very point that Mr Kinahan made.

Part of the infrastructure is hotel accommodation. Although it is not an easy task, the ability to reconcile a planning application for a new hotel on that site with the scale and size of everything that is around it across the Causeway area is difficult but can be done. The fact that this took a long time is evidence that it could be done, and that is how I judge it.

The decision was, second, based on the fact that there was a golfing opportunity and golfing product as part of the signature project. Further evidence of the golfing product is Rory McIlroy very nearly winning the Accenture Match Play Championship title in Arizona last weekend. As he said himself after that tournament, it is inevitable that he is going to be world number one. Therefore, there are issues around the golf product and golf tourism and the opportunities that those create.

People go and play golf up there but they do not stay up there. The evidence is that people come to the North and spend only 60% of what people spend in other jurisdictions on these islands when it comes to their spend per pound or euro. Given that narrative, therefore, that piece of land needs to be managed in the way that Mr Kinahan indicated. Any developments therein, be they the hotel, cycle paths, pedestrian ways or the golf course itself, will be done in sympathy with the particular designation of the Giant's Causeway. Remember, the golf course will be a dune course, which will reinstate the land to its original condition of many years ago, before the farming enclosure.

Mr Dallat: I welcome the Minister's statement. I want to turn attention away from the golf for a moment to large retail developments. I note that the Minister will insist on independent retail assessments where those are considered. Can the

Minister assure us that the independent assessments are really independent and, where recommendations are made restricting floor space, they will be insisted on by the planners? Furthermore, will the Minister discourage the planners from entertaining subsequent planning applications for extensions to stores that already exist, all, of course, in the interest of our town centres, which have the capacity to suffer greatly where development gets out of sync?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his questions. They capture a lot of the issues around in-town, edge-of-town and out-of-town retail development. One third or thereabouts of article 31 applications are for retail.

Therefore, it is absolutely critical how those applications are managed by the article 31 team and decided by me in the event that they come before me. That is why I got the Executive's endorsement of draft PPS 5, which I welcome. It tries to create a better balance between in town, out of town and edge of town.

Draft PPS 5 is already a somewhat dated document, given that it came out in 2006. There has been a legal challenge and various issues around it since that time. It had to be issued in its original format because, for legal reasons, we could not take on board the consultation response that came in a number of years ago. Draft PPS 5 is arguably not all that it should be in dealing with all the issues that Mr Dallat raised in his question. For that reason, whatever about the draft current PPS 5, officials are now working on a new PPS 5 to better express the chain of circumstances over the past four or five years when it comes to in town and out of town, and in order for any draft to better reflect my thinking when it comes to the configuration of in town and out of town.

There is the potential for new policy; it has to go for consultation, through the Executive, to the Committee and all the rest. In the meantime, as I indicated, one third of all live article 31 applications are retail-related. There are four in Mr McGlone's neck of the woods in Magherafelt, nine in Derry, four in Newtownards, two in Newry and other retail issues in other towns across Northern Ireland.

I have indicated two things. First, I hope that all those applications will be determined between now and June. Developers need to have certainty in the planning system, which is why I am minded to try to get those all over the line by June one way or the other, whatever the decision might be. Secondly, I want to ensure that communities that need new retail opportunities get those retail opportunities but, at the same time, get the balance right between in town, out of town and edge of town. Those are very difficult decisions, to which I will bring my own view and judgement, consistent with planning policy. Decisions will be subject to the Department's assessment of retail impact, whether in Magherafelt, Derry, Newtownards or elsewhere.

I do not want to get into the detail of any one or other application. There has been a lot of comment in recent days, some of which is mistaken in my view. However, I want to make it very clear that my judgement is that, in the round, we need to do more to protect town centres and encourage big retailers to locate in town centres and on the edge of towns. As we move forward with a new planning policy, we need to reconfigure the presumption that seems to have existed that out of town has primacy.

Mr Cree: I, too, thank the Minister for his statement and support the thrust of improving the Planning Service. This is possibly not strictly related to article 31, but will the Minister advise on the current situation in respect of the Belfast metropolitan area plan? Is it ever likely to see the light of day again?

Mr Attwood: I regularly ask the same questions myself. The PAC has now handed over to the Department all elements of the Belfast metropolitan area plan draft. It was for the PAC to manage its own affairs and make its own assessments of the metropolitan plan, and that part of the process has now concluded. The consequence is that the Department now has custody of all the relevant documents and is beginning to work through the process. I discussed the matter with officials again yesterday.

On one reading of it, it could take up to a year. I am going to be very straightforward about this; it could take up to a further year for the Department to interrogate what the PAC has concluded before the final report can be published in full, because the Department has to assess the recommendations from the PAC. Although it may be presumed that the vast majority therein will be accepted, there will be areas that may not be accepted and which I may not be of a mind to accept. On one reading, it could be another year — another year after many years. That does not create certainty for communities, developers or those people with land who are on the edge of going under, and who, if they had opportunities to develop, might be able to survive, and, with that, create job opportunities.

3.30 pm

Over the past number of weeks, I have asked officials to identify whether there are opportunities to release parts of the report on a rolling basis, rather than to wait for the issue of a final report in up to a year's time. That is a very difficult matter. We are taking legal advice on it, because a partial plan could lead to all sorts of legal, practical and policy issues. I have asked officials to look at it. Yesterday, I asked them to look again at whether it was possible to release, on a phased basis, parts of the report's conclusions on which there were accepted and settled views.

It is a work in progress, and I am unable to be more definitive at the moment. I absolutely identify with the sentiment of the question, but when it comes to this matter, I need to make sure that I am on the right side of the law and of good process.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for bringing the statement before the House. Although, quite often, blame for delays in bringing forward decisions on planning applications is rightly apportioned to Planning Service, there are other times when the decisions are not within its grasp. Perhaps the Minister could give us some sort of an outline of the situations in which the delay might be as a result of the case being referred to the PAC, for example. Perhaps you could provide details. Alternatively, the delay could be due to other circumstances, such as an agent or a developer not providing the Department with the necessary detail to process an application, or the bringing of a legal case via a judicial review, for instance. Such actions completely hold up the process of a project. Those things are outwith the control of Planning Service.

Mr Attwood: As with Mr Dallat's question, I think that captures a lot of the issues around where culpability may or may not reside when it comes to the management of planning applications, be it article 31 applications or otherwise. The application that has been with the strategic planning team for the longest time has been there for 13 years. It is in respect of a marina development in Larne. There might be some further developments there, because a cross-party delegation from Larne Borough Council came to see me before Christmas. I assure people that that delay has very little to do with the planning system; it is all to do with the scale of, and issues around, that project.

Similarly, as the Member indicated, some matters have to go before the Planning Appeals Commission. The article 31 applications in respect of John Lewis, the airport extension and the North/South interconnector are subject to independent interrogation by the PAC. As we know from the BMAP experience, the PAC is responsible for its own conduct and affairs, and once a case is capable of going before the PAC, it will adapt its processes. We are always cautious about these issues, but the PAC hearing in respect of the North/South interconnector is scheduled to commence next week, on 6 March.

As Mr McGlone also indicated, we have a number of what appear to be well-resourced groups and individuals with the weight and legal capacity behind them to make applications to the High Court in respect of judicial reviews, which, on occasions, go to the Supreme Court and even beyond that.

Some of those matters are beyond our control, because they are subject to good process and are the proper entitlement of those involved in the planning system, be they objectors or proposers. Mr McGlone's point is very valid. We should be able to control that which is within our control. In that regard, agents have an obligation. I do not want to go into any particular detail at the moment. However, there seems to be a pattern of flaws and fault lines in the significant volume of applications in respect of energy proposals. That is because they are being regurgitated, without taking into account the individual circumstances of the application. It is up to a farmer or somebody else to decide who to employ as their agent. However, they should be more demanding of their agent if there is a consistent pattern of flaws or fault lines in applications coming from that person. I am not going to comment on that in any great detail. There is an obligation on agents and the people funding them to make sure that the agents do their job in order to ensure that all these issues are expedited in the way that Mr McGlone would like.

Mr Allister: It is good to see progress on a number of these long-outstanding article 31 enquiries and applications, and I commend the Minister for the action he has taken in expediting them. Will he update the House on the Rose Energy application and advise us on where it is in the process? Can he assure us, since he made the point in respect of Runkerry and others, that his decision will be informed by the need for the project and that the urgency of that project for the poultry industry will be a strong influence in the ultimate making of that long-overdue decision?

Mr Attwood: I thank Mr Allister for his question. I thought for a moment that he might declare an interest, given his background in the courts. I do not know whether you represented anybody who challenged the planning system. Was it just the Attorney General?

Mr Allister: None of these ones.

Mr Attwood: I can confirm that Rose Energy is at an advanced stage in the planning system. I note the Member's point in respect of the need to dispose of chicken litter and other residue as part of the capacity to grow our poultry industry. Not very far from here, in the Republic of Ireland, there are examples of how the agrifood industry has been part of the Irish economy's recovery programme as it comes out of recession. I am sure that there will be a lot more on that over the next period of time.

Yesterday, I met one of the organisations involved in the poultry industry. It is about to produce a report in March that identifies where opportunities exist for the development of the agrifood industry, and part of the strategy will address the need to deal with chicken litter. The proposed site is in a very sensitive area, à la Runkerry, as it is adjacent to one of the great natural assets in the North and is not far from residential areas and settled communities. So, it is a bit like the situation with Runkerry, which is near the Giant's Causeway.

A very hard judgement will have to be made, and nobody should be in denial about that. We need to balance the needs of the poultry industry, in respect of the disposal of chicken litter and other residue, with the very obvious and self-evident environmental, community and residential concerns that exist. Another factor that has been brought to my attention in relation to the application is the fact that we have very significant life science employment sites in that neighbourhood, be it Almac or any of the other life science sites that offer the opportunity of high-value jobs. So, as with Runkerry, fine judgements will be needed. However, I will not shirk from making those judgements, whatever they might be.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas an tráthnóna seo. I thank the Minister for his statement and welcome the robust approach that he has adopted to expedite that aspect of the planning process. In the consideration of article 31 applications, what weight does the Minister give to their job creation and economic potential? How does he balance that potential against other considerations?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. The very character of article 31 applications is that they may have some significant impact, be it environmental, economic or jobs-related. If one was to go through the live applications, on which, I believe, the Committee is updated on a rolling basis, one would see the truth of all of that. They include a marina at Larne, one on waste, food stores, golf resorts, a biomass fuel power plant — the very one to which Mr Allister referred — and runway extensions.

The nature and character of those applications is that they are complex and/or controversial or they have a potential environmental impact or, ultimately, an impact on jobs. As Runkerry demonstrates, one must be alert and vigilant in interrogating all the various issues therein. The judgements are not easy and have legacy consequences. Anybody involved in political life must, when making calls of that nature, which have legacy consequences, be vigilant and alert.

As I said, balance can be achieved. There can be reconciliation between the environment and jobs and between in-town and out-of-town interests. The decisions are not straightforward. However, we are not employed as politicians just to be straightforward.

Mr Byrne: I, too, very much welcome the statement. It is good for investment and has the potential to create jobs in different areas of Northern Ireland. Will the Minister elaborate on his comments on the waste-to-energy proposals? Does he accept that one of the biggest difficulties now pertaining to such plants or, indeed, wind farms is that of connecting to the grid?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. As he will appreciate, probably more than many other Members from different constituencies, renewable energy is arguably the single biggest economic opportunity for the North and Ireland. I have said that repeatedly, and I believe that it is true. The scale of wind farms in his area of the North, the number of applications for wind turbines and the growing number of applications for anaerobic digesters — most of which are dealt with in local offices, as will increasingly be the case as time rolls on — are all evidence and part of the narrative that demonstrates that.

I confirm that there are a number of waste-to-energy applications in the planning system as well as that by Rose Energy Limited. I do not anticipate that all of them will be dealt with by the end of June 2012, as some will take longer to assess.

I cannot recall the second part of the question.

Mr Byrne: I asked about connection to the grid.

Mr Attwood: The Member is quite right to raise that issue. As I said in response to a previous question at Question Time, if all renewable energy applications that already have approval or are likely to get approval were connected to the grid, the renewable target of between 1,400 and 1,800 megawatts by 2020, which would then be 40% of the energy output, would be met.

3.45 pm

In my view, there will not be an issue around the planning system with regard to ensuring that there is a sufficient number of approvals to reach that target and to work towards surpassing it. The issue will be whether those who get planning approval will have the financial wherewithal to build and, critically, whether there will be connection into the national grid to achieve the 40% outcome. That matter falls to DETI in the first instance and to the regulator in the second instance. There are issues that are part of an ongoing conversation to address whether the national grid will be sufficiently upgraded to ensure that the 40% will be attained. That is not an easy judgement because it is a huge investment stretching into billions of pounds. That investment has to be paid for, and it will come back into the pockets of those who use electricity. Therefore, those are not easy judgements. However, in my view, there will not be any impediment on the planning side in the roll-out of planning approvals for renewable energy applications. That is not where the issue will arise. If issues arise, they will reside elsewhere.

Mr Givan: I do not envy the Minister his job. I recognise the complex nature of dealing with article 31 planning applications and decisions, and I appreciate the frustrations of getting all the submissions from different bodies, which often do not come on time, and the constant need to chase people.

I have an interest in article 31 in that it deals with the John Lewis application at Sprucefield. I am aware that the

environmental assessments have been submitted to the Department. Can the Minister indicate when the Department will be in a position to push the application back again to the Planning Appeals Commission, and has DOE retained the applications as one of its top priorities for the PAC to deal with?

Mr Attwood: The Member is right in that we have received further environmental information. I have the answer to the second part of his question somewhere in the recesses of my mind. Clearly, some assessments have to be made in that regard. I cannot quite recall how quickly, if at all, we will be in a position to refer the matter back to the PAC. However, you are quite right: the information has been received and assessed, and I will confirm with you in writing the likely process thereafter. Given the history of the matter, it is time for the PAC, hopefully, to be in a place to make a recommendation and for a decision to be made thereafter.

Mr Agnew: The Minister referred to the proposed runway extension at Belfast City Airport. Can he confirm whether the airport management has submitted all the information needed for a decision to be made? If so, does he have a timeline as to when the public inquiry will take place?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. I understand that the airport management has not submitted the further environmental information required for the PAC to go live. The airport management has to explain its approach. The Member is aware that there is a free-standing issue around the noise contour, which is a legacy issue arising from the planning agreement made in 2006, and it remains unresolved. There may be a difference of view about how it came to be unresolved, why it remains unresolved, and the history of the issue. However, when I came into this office, the noise contour issue had been unresolved for a number of years. As I keep saying, it was time to create certainty and avoid doubt, and that was one of the issues where it was needed to create certainty and avoid doubt.

Consequently, through conversations with the airport management, advice from officials and by keeping third parties informed of what was happening, a process has been designed whereby the issue of noise contour will be subject to independent examination. We have been awaiting further environmental information from the airport's management on the noise contour issue, and it is my understanding that, in the past 24 hours, that information has been submitted to the Department. I will discuss that matter with officials, and I will take forward the process that I indicated earlier of subjecting the noise contour issue to independent examination. That examination will have an independent chair and there will be a process that will allow appropriate input from all concerned, including those who have objected and local residents. It is a matter for the airport authorities and I cannot give a definitive view, but it is my expectation that if the issue of the airport extension is dealt with at all, it will be dealt with on the far side of that independent examination.

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

Private Members' Business

Carjacking

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

Mr P Maskey: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Justice to respond to public concerns about the recent pattern of carjackings, particularly in relation to the role of prolific offenders and the conditions on which they are given bail; and further calls on the Minister to develop and resource a strategy to curb this crime and engender public confidence.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The reason why we have tabled this motion is that, in recent times and especially since the start of this year, there has been increased media attention on carjackings or car hijackings, whatever terminology we want to use. First, I want to thank the Business Committee for selecting the motion and the members of the Assembly's Research and Information Service for their work in providing us with some background information.

Our motion is a simple one, but it is very serious in trying to tackle the issue that we are all faced with. I was at a district policing partnership (DPP) meeting in west Belfast last night, and I have raised this issue with the PSNI at a local level in west Belfast and with its north and west Belfast district command. From those meetings, and from looking through some of the research, I have learned that the crime is not specific to the city of Belfast. Indeed, there has been a lot of similar crime for a long time across the North of Ireland and beyond.

Our motion is about the "prolific offenders". It calls on the Minister to:

"develop and resource a strategy to curb this crime and engender public confidence."

It is quite clear that the public have lost confidence in how the state, the police and the judicial system are treating this matter.

Sinn Féin has called on people in the community to come forward if they have any information, and I repeat that call today. If anyone has any information about offenders involved in this type of crime, they should come forward and give that information to the PSNI as a matter of urgency.

I know that the DUP has tabled an amendment to the motion. We have not finalised our position on that amendment but are looking at it. We would like to hear exactly what the DUP has to say. Its amendment calls for the introduction of

"tougher sentences". There is a 15-year maximum sentence for this type of crime, but even though there are prolific offenders, I do not know whether anyone has ever received that maximum sentence. There seems to be a revolving door for those who commit this type of car crime: they are arrested and then let out after a short period. I urge the Minister of Justice, who is here today, to take that seriously and to give us his views on the revolving door system that there seems to be for prolific offenders.

There is a possibility that the Department of Justice could carry out a review of higher sentences that could be imposed, but in light of the DUP amendment, which looks for tougher sentences, we think that it is probably more appropriate to have effective sentences. It is all about how the issue is dealt with.

The crime statistics in the research papers show that there have been a number of arrests. There have been 18 or 19 arrests in Belfast specifically related to car crime offences and at least six people have been charged. Seventeen proactive searches have been carried out and 65 arrests have been made in total in connection with a range of criminal activities across the North. Yet, confidence has not been established in our community, and people need to see that issues are being resolved.

It is my belief also that when the PSNI arrest people in cars and release them on police bail, they must state very clearly to the media what that is about. Even though we are told that four or five people have been arrested in a car, those people can sometimes be arrested as far as half a mile away from a particular car. That needs to be explained, because information and evidence have to be gathered. The police must gather that evidence much more speedily than they have done to date, because on many occasions, it takes a long time for people to be charged and sentenced, and, sometimes, we see them being released very quickly.

It would be remiss of me not to say that car crime has been prevalent in our society for many years. Many people have been killed on our streets over many years, and, thankfully, that has reduced. That is down to the work of the car crime team, the fact that the community has come forward with information, and the fact that people in the community have put an emphasis on challenging the state to come up with more effective sentences and to make it harder for people to commit such offences.

We have lost numerous people, and I hope that the issue will be tackled as soon as possible with resources and a strategy. When individuals steal cars, they drive them around our streets in a reckless manner and could end up killing someone. That is my fear, and it is why we have tabled the motion today. Many people have to be commended for tackling the problem, and I hope that there will not be any more deaths on our roads as a result of this particular type of car crime.

The unfortunate thing is that most of the victims of the recent attacks have been females. People ask why that is; I suppose it is because the criminals who carry out those crimes will always look for the easiest target. I say fair play to Anna Lo, who was nearly a victim of a carjacking crime, for standing up to those individuals and not giving up her car. The criminals will always look for the most vulnerable in society, and people have to look out for that and be wary

of it. We all have a part to play. The PSNI has a part to play by making sure that they gather information as soon as possible so that charges can be laid, and the judicial system must make sure that it hands down effective sentences and that prolific reoffenders are not allowed out through the revolving door.

People have been pulled out of cars and bricks have been put through car windows. As recently as last week, an individual was hit in the face with a hammer. I know that the police are looking at other motives in connection with that incident, but, nonetheless, a man was hit in the face with a hammer and was hospitalised while his car was stolen and burnt out a short distance away. I have met a number of people who have experienced that type of crime, and some of the TV interviews over recent days and weeks have shown that people are horrified and fearful.

In some cases, fathers and mothers are afraid to let their daughters get into the car at the weekend, in different parts of Belfast and other places, because they are fearful that someone will try to steal their car and cause them damage. We all need to tackle that.

4.00 pm

We have called and will continue to call for people to come forward on this. As I said when I opened the debate, it is not a new crime. It is unfortunate that a task force was set up only after the media started to raise the issue and when local politicians and local people went on to the TV screens and got on to their local papers to write stories about it. That seems to be the only time that the PSNI and the judicial system take action, and that is not good enough. This crime has been going on for a long time, and the authorities need to step up to the mark and ensure that they are tackling it to reduce the fear in society and to reduce that type of crime.

As I said, I was at a DPP meeting last night in west Belfast, and a number of proposals have come forward. The task force has said that people should be aware of what to do. They should lock doors and close their windows and ensure that they do not have any valuables lying about their car when they park it, because that makes it an easy target for criminals. We all must ensure that we protect ourselves to the best of our abilities and minimise the chance of an attack.

A strategy needs to be introduced. That needs to be resourced, and additional resources are being put into the PSNI to tackle the issue. I have no doubt that, once this goes away from the media spotlight, those resources will be pulled from it. I am concerned about that, and many of my constituents who I talk to have that concern. We must all tackle the issue. If there is a fear in our society, we all have our part to play in tackling it.

There are many issues for the judicial system, the community and the PSNI. In addition, some of the people who carry out that type of crime are very young, so the social services also have a part to play. In many cases, there is neglect from families, some of the statutory organisations and social services. They are not tackling it. If we do not all tackle the issue together, we will all fail the people affected by this crime. We will listen to the DUP's amendment and take it very seriously.

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

“, including introducing tougher sentences.”

I congratulate the Members who brought the motion to the Floor of the House. We are all very aware of the recent spate of carjackings that has dominated the news headlines of late, and, from my role on the Policing Board, I know that, unfortunately, the issue has been coming up over the past few months. We have been questioning the Chief Constable on the issue almost incessantly, and everyone in the House and in the community would like to see headway made on that and, ultimately, those who are involved in this terrible crime brought to justice.

We could probably spend a fair bit of this time bandying around statistics on what is happening and what is not happening. The most important thing that is happening that we have to highlight is this crime. It is vital that we recognise that, whether because of the media profile or because of genuine fear — I feel that is probably more likely to be genuine fear — a significant number of people are thinking very seriously before they go into town on their own in their car. They are certainly very aware of their security and are relatively fearful when they are in their cars. That is particularly the case with females who are in their car on their own. As the Member for West Belfast pointed out, it is predominantly females who have been the victims of this crime. Those are genuine fears, and we in the Assembly have to step up to the mark and send out a clear message on what we are going to do about the issue and try to address the public's concerns head on. Of course, other agencies will have to be involved, and we certainly acknowledge that the PSNI will have a large part to play. We welcome the establishment of the task force for carjacking, and we wish the PSNI well in its efforts.

The reason that we brought this amendment forward is quite simple. Mr Maskey has thrown down the challenge for us to win him over, and I am more than happy to take that challenge up. We have to acknowledge that, whether we are talking about antisocial behaviour or about attacks on the elderly, as we have in the Assembly in previous months, we are talking about another crime that is making a pretty large section of our community very uneasy as it goes about its day-to-day life. We also have to accept that, although we may not want to admit it and it may be uncomfortable to listen to, there is a group of people in our society who, quite frankly, feel that they are above the law. We have to send out a clear message to those involved in this crime that if they are caught they will face severe consequences. We would welcome negotiations with the Department of Justice on what those measures should be.

If somebody leaves the pub tonight having drunk too much and gets into their car with their keys, they know that by putting the key in the ignition they will lose their licence if they are caught. Such minimum sentencing, if we could use that term, is what ultimately has resulted in drink-driving being brought pretty much under control, certainly from where it was five or 10 years ago. It is ultimately about sending out the message that if you are involved in this crime, you will face the consequences. We cannot pander to people who feel that they are above the law. That is the message, and that is why we felt that the amendment was necessary. It does not take away from the motion;

we do not want to do that as we support the motion fully. However, we felt that the amendment added weight to it by acknowledging the fact that it is a crime and should be dealt with as a crime.

Let us be clear about how despicable and cowardly this crime is: it is a violation of somebody's liberty. All of us in the Assembly who are drivers know how dependent we become on our cars, whether to get to and from work or to drop the kids off at nursery, take them home from school or to take them to the events that they are involved in in the evening. A car is a vital part of everyday life now; therefore to have it taken away is not a petty crime. If I lost my car today, I would find myself in a very difficult position, and I would probably have to hitch a lift home with Jim Allister, although I do not see him here this afternoon.

As with previous debates on similar issues, it probably appears that it is falling on the DUP to take the slightly more right-wing conservative line. In this instance, we are glad to take that position because we feel that it is important that crime should be dealt with in a way that sends out a message that such behaviour is not acceptable.

I accept that the Minister will most likely say something along the lines that in issues of sentencing a certain dispensation is given to the judiciary to set its own guidelines and that we are not to interfere in that. I accept that to some extent. However, the fact is that, the last time I checked, we were still living in a democracy, and our role, as elected representatives, is to listen to the people, who are very concerned about this issue. I do not think that it will cut it for us to send out a message that it is a job for the judiciary and the police. I do not think the public are going to let us away with that. It is very important that today, following on from the debate, we send out the message loud and clear that we are committed to working with the police and the judiciary, but with a very urgent need to bring the issue under control and deal with it as quickly as is humanly possible.

I do not want to pre-empt what the Minister is going to say, but we do have to acknowledge that, on issues around the London riots, for example, there were quite quick changes made to how the legal process works in response to the will of the people and of the Government that were in place at that time. We cannot just take a back seat and pass the buck over to someone else. The issues are here now. The challenge is set before us to get them sorted out as quickly as we can.

Tougher sentences are one thing to consider against the people who are committing these heinous crimes, but it must be clear that the potential rewards gained by committing those acts at the moment pale in comparison to the punishment awaiting them when they are caught. There is a revolving door, as the Member for West Belfast mentioned. The public who are coming to us are increasingly frustrated that there seems to be very little deterrent to stop the people who are carrying out these crimes from doing so. We therefore ask that the Minister takes those thoughts on board.

What we are looking for is a punishment that fits the crime. We want to echo the words of the proposer of the motion: information that anyone has about these incidents should be brought forward to the PSNI. We fully support the establishment of the car hijacking task force and wish it well in its efforts. We want to publicly say that we will support

it and help it in whatever way we can in order to bring that crime under control. It is a very important issue, and I believe that the media has had a certain degree of interest in it. It is not unknown for the media to sometimes take issues and slightly blow them out of proportion, but this is an issue that is causing a lot of people fear in our streets, and that is something that we cannot just sit back and allow to happen. Therefore, we will be supporting the motion, but we urge the House to support the amendment as well.

Mr Hussey: I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on this subject today. "Carjacking" is a new term to me. Prior to this the offence was known as hijacking; "hijack" is defined in the Oxford English Reference Dictionary as:

"take over ... by force or subterfuge in order to redirect".

That is clearly what happens in these cases. I am sure there is a similar explanation available in the Irish language. We have a scenario where thugs forcibly take possession of a car, drive around for a period and then destroy the vehicle and subsequently the forensic evidence that may link them with the crime. In the past few months in particular, that crime has been very evident in west Belfast and it has, unfortunately, spread into rural areas as well, with examples recently taking place in my own constituency of West Tyrone.

Unfortunately, we in this society have been aware of this offence for a very long time. Since the early 1970s, teenagers were encouraged by paramilitary organisations — some with links to political parties that now sit on the Benches of this Chamber — to hijack cars in order to terrorise the community and tie up security forces, but we are now supposedly in better times, so we can forget the past. Perhaps that is why the term "carjacking" is being used, so that we cannot be accused of looking back to what was a horrendous crime 30 years ago and now create a new crime so that we can condemn it and call for stiffer sanctions against the perpetrators.

I am not known for my liberal views in relation to criminals. I have a very clear notion in my head as to how those who break the law and terrorise communities or individuals should be dealt with. In this instance we have a scenario where generally the person targeted is female and alone. Cars are stolen and then destroyed. That is clearly antisocial, and no right-thinking individual could or would do anything other than condemn those actions. The Police Service of Northern Ireland has a role to play, and we all know that it must work to the letter of the law. I quote from an article in last Thursday's 'Irish News' by Newton Emerson:

"having been embarrassed into setting up a hijacking taskforce, the PSNI has achieved fairly rapid results and further criticism of its performance would be misplaced. Specifically, it is unfair to lambast officers for releasing suspects under police bail. Sinn Fein representatives have described this as 'lazy policing' and denounced police bail as 'a loophole'. In fact police bail is a well-established way to extend the period of evidence-gathering before a charge must be brought. Its use suggests officers are working hard to build the strongest case possible."

4.15 pm

There are those in this House who would not allow the police one second of leeway if they were to hold a suspect for one second longer than police and criminal evidence

(PACE) regulations allow. In fact, they would be protesting outside police stations in certain circumstances to demand the release of those who are held. Are we now demanding a breakaway from PACE? I support the notion that someone who terrorises the community in any fashion should be removed from that society as soon as possible, for as long as possible.

Mr P Maskey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hussey: Not at the moment; no. If someone chooses to throw a petrol bomb, they should go straight to jail, and stay there. If someone is found in possession of a hijacked vehicle, he should go straight to jail, be dealt with by the courts almost immediately, and be returned to jail. However, we have the conundrum of the law and proof. If someone is suspected of being involved in hijacking a car, and even the dogs in the streets know he has done it, but there is no evidence to support that suspicion, there is absolutely no way that the individual can be detained for any longer than the law currently allows.

In Northern Ireland, there are known terrorists but the proof that they committed an offence is not available. I would love to see those individuals incarcerated until such proof is found, but that would be seen by some in this House as internment, and would be frowned upon. I would love to give the police further powers to detain those individuals, but we would be accused of running a police state if someone were arrested and no forensic evidence can be found to support detention for any longer than the time currently allowed.

A review of sentencing is certainly appropriate. Hijackers and petrol-bombers should spend a very long time behind bars, but only once they have been found guilty by due process. Repeat offenders should also be made aware that a second offence of hijacking or petrol-bombing can and will lead to a life sentence. The laws are already there but are not being used because the miscreants generally face a lesser charge. We must remember that those who carry out such actions sentence their victims to a lifetime of fear.

Mr Eastwood: I welcome the motion and thank the proposer, Mr Maskey, for bringing it to the House. This is a very serious issue, especially for the communities in Belfast that have had to deal with it. On behalf of the SDLP I want to say to all those who have been victims of so-called carjacking — we do not have to look very far to find one of them — that our sympathy is with you. This should never happen in a society in the 21st century.

It is also important to say that there are people living every day in all our communities right across the North with the fear and the reality of antisocial behaviour. It is very important that, together, as an Assembly, we condemn antisocial behaviour and all the things that flow from it. However, it is more important to try to deal with it. Sentences should definitely be a deterrent; no one should feel free to go around committing whatever crimes they want. We also have to be mindful that a sentencing review is ongoing. My view is that we should sensibly and systematically look at sentences for all crimes across the community, but the bottom line is that there will never be a real systematic attack on antisocial behaviour unless we continue the good work of community policing. The promise of Patten has delivered a lot in policing our society and in our communities, but community policing has to go much

further. We need better partnership between the police and our communities, and that goes both ways. Every one of us has a responsibility to ensure that community policing becomes a byword of society.

This is also a debate about the nature of the justice system. We have to be aware that the justice system must provide deterrence to anyone who would think about going out and attacking someone in their home or hijacking a car. However, the justice system also needs to focus on prevention and rehabilitation. That might not be the most populist thing to say today, but it is true. I hope that the noises from the Justice Minister in that regard will become a reality in the justice system. We need to get better at ensuring that people who at a very early age have first contact with the justice system do not become repeat offenders, which is the cycle that we are currently in. Most people who enter the justice system at an early age stay in it or repeatedly come into contact with it. That needs to change.

We also need to be mindful that very real social conditions bring about antisocial behaviour. I am not the kind of person who often quotes Tony Blair, but forgive me if I say that we need to be strong on crime — tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. Quoting Tony Blair is a first for me. However, it is true.

The bottom line is that people should not feel fear, not only in this city but across the North, that their car will be hijacked or they will be victims of any other antisocial behaviour. Communities need to work with the police, and the police need to work with communities to ensure that anybody who thinks that it is OK to attack members of our community will face the full rigours of the law. This year, there have been 21 carjackings in Belfast, which is just not acceptable. Visible community policing needs to be embedded. The Patten process has brought about a great transformation, not least in the nationalist community. However, community policing should not be seen simply as comforting phraseology; it should be at the heart of everything that the police do. Public representatives, the community, the justice system and the police have a role in bringing carjacking to an end.

Ms Lo: I welcome the chance to speak to today's motion. As Members are probably aware, I recently experienced an attempted car hijacking near my constituency office in South Belfast. I take this opportunity to thank all the people who have been in contact with me to offer their support, and also the police for their very swift response.

I have been concerned about the issue of car-hijacking crime for some time. Just a few weeks ago, I met a constituent whose car had been hijacked and subsequently burned out. From that meeting and from my personal experience, I want to highlight the aftermath of such a crime for victims. It is not only what occurs during a car hijacking or an attempted hijacking that impacts those targeted. If a car hijacking is successful, the victims of the crime have to deal not only with the trauma of the incident itself but with the consequences of losing their car, which is often used for joyriding, then wrecked and burned out within a very short time. If there are personal belongings in a car, the car hijacking can result in a loss of credit cards, driving licences, money, house or office keys, personal documents that give victims' work or home addresses, mobile phones or laptops. There is then the problem of sorting out insurance and

getting a replacement car. Car-hijacking crime represents mindless destruction and causes horrible stress and anxiety to its victims.

Although I welcome the motion, I find it difficult to support the amendment, which calls for the Minister to introduce tougher sentencing for those who are convicted of car hijacking. Although I appreciate the sentiment, Members should be aware that the current maximum sentence, as Mr Maskey mentioned, is 15 years. Obviously, it is up to the judiciary to determine sentences in individual cases; it is not for the Minister to decide. I am aware that the Minister will address the motion's concern regarding bail, and it is important to highlight the need for due process in such matters.

The final part of the motion focuses on the need to curb this crime. I appreciate that the PSNI has established a special task force to step up patrolling and gather intelligence to make arrests.

I am thinking back to the young person who tried to take my car and I am wondering why he wanted to do that. He was breaking the law and putting his and others' lives at risk in so-called joyriding for a quick thrill. We have a section of our young people in Northern Ireland that is not in education, employment or training and has become disenfranchised in our society. Those young people feel that they are excluded and do not have a stake in our society.

Over the weekend, the former chief probation officer Breidge Gadd wrote in 'The Irish News' about the successful response to joyriding in west Belfast some years ago. Then, the Probation Service worked in partnership with local community groups and statutory agencies to identify known joyriders and to approach young people and those close to them in order to encourage them to take part in an intensive programme that was created to enable them to move away from drink and drugs and address social exclusion and life in and out of prison. Independent research has shown that the majority of young people in that scheme did change the direction of their lives. Perhaps it is time to revamp that scheme in order to stop this new wave of car hijacking.

We need to be proactive in bringing our disenfranchised youth back into society.

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

Ms Lo: We need to resource and promote diversionary incentives. This is not just a justice issue. All Departments have a responsibility to ensure that we are engaging young people and tackling youth disenchantment.

Mr Givan: I support the motion and commend the Members for bringing it forward.

This is a serious crime and, as Members have indicated, 15 years is certainly a serious punishment for it. Perhaps the Minister will tell us how many people have received that sentence; then he may understand why those on this side of the House feel that a message needs to go out that, when people are being sentenced, a tough sentence is being administered.

There needs to be a very robust response to this type of crime. I think that we are seeing that from the police. The Policing Board is certainly taking the matter seriously in the

way in which it is pressing the police on the issue. At the moment, this crime is primarily being focused on in Belfast. However, Mr Hussey highlighted an incident that he has had in west Tyrone. In my constituency in times past, when the police focused resources into tackling a problem, that problem moved into neighbouring constituencies. Therefore, it is important that the solution and response are not just for Belfast, and that we are looking at areas around Northern Ireland. I do not want people thinking that it is too dangerous to attempt the crime in Belfast, so they will try it in Lisburn. That has happened in the past when it came to car theft, in particular. We need a response that is not just for Belfast but for the whole Province.

The problem is that the culprits have absolutely no fear of being caught. They do not fear the consequences of being caught, and I think that that speaks volumes for the type of justice system that exists in Northern Ireland. Individuals who are caught will be the first to communicate to the authorities about their rights and any rights that they believe may be being infringed. I believe that there is a need for the Justice Minister to articulate the rights of the individuals facing this type of crime. In countries such as South Africa, where carjacking is a particular problem — and I am not advocating this — vehicles are fitted with devices that will hurt the individual carrying out the attack.

Indeed, some are fitted with flamethrowers. I do not think that people in Northern Ireland would want that, but what if we do not have a justice system that will properly deal with that type of crime and people are not aware of what their rights are? Perhaps the Justice Minister could tell us what rights an individual in a vehicle has to defend their property. I know that people would be very reluctant to defend their property if someone tries to steal it for fear that they themselves would be taken before the courts to face punishment. That is the perverse system that we find ourselves in, where law-abiding people are fearful but lawbreakers are not. That problem needs to be solved.

4.30 pm

The motion also mentions bail. When people, whether drug dealers or those involved in car theft, are released on bail and sent back out into the community, what I hear in my constituency is that people do not feel that justice is being done. If justice is not seen to be done, justice is in danger. What I hear from local people is, "We need to take the law into our own hands". We face a constant battle to tell people that they have to work with the police and that, as much as they find the legal system and how it operates frustrating, they cannot take the law into their own hands. However, pressure is being put on local communities and individuals in those communities to take action. If the justice system does not deal with that type of crime properly, that is the scenario that we will end up in; people will feel that they have to take the law into their own hands.

I commend the motion and what it is trying to articulate. I think our amendment will send a clear message that, when people are being sentenced for this type of crime, it should be a tough sentence.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I, too, speak in favour of the motion, which was moved by my colleague Paul Maskey. I welcome Minister Ford's presence at the debate and apologise for not being able to remain for

the latter part of the debate; I have to attend the monthly meeting of the Assembly Commission, in Room 106, to be exact. I will certainly read the Hansard report tomorrow to find out exactly what the Minister says in his response.

Of late, carjacking has been mentioned as a predominately urban phenomenon. A lot of incidents have taken place in the city of Belfast and the greater Belfast area, but it has spread to some rural areas as well, including Coalisland and Carrickmore. I am particularly conscious of an incident that happened on Sunday 19 February — hopefully a one-off incident — in the Carrickmore area, at the garage forecourt of one of the local supermarkets — Centra, by the way. A 19-year-old male who had returned to his car was taken out of it and the vehicle was taken away.

I agree with the emphasis that David McIlveen placed on the inconvenience that this crime causes for the individual and the families who are dependent on the family car, not least in a rural setting, where the local transport system may not be adequate and the transport options are not plentiful. I think, too, of the cost of running a car and the tax, insurance and MOT payments. It causes huge inconvenience for the individual and the families affected.

We have learned that the PSNI recently established a task force and appointed a particular investigation team and that there is a campaign to raise public awareness in the greater Belfast area. I hope that the Minister can use his influence to ensure that that campaign is extended to rural areas, where I believe the problem may be more prevalent than the public realises.

Last Friday, the MP and MLA for West Tyrone, Pat Doherty, councillor Declan McAleer and I met senior PSNI officers in Omagh to discuss the latest incident in West Tyrone and a range of other matters. We were making progress on some issues, but I did not get a sense at that meeting that there was an adequate strategy even to raise awareness of the problem in rural communities.

Simple steps have been outlined, but there needs to be a rural awareness campaign. The PSNI also needs to work on the matter with major retailers and garage shop owners in particular.

The motion has a number of elements. It calls on the Minister to:

“develop and resource a strategy to curb this crime and engender public confidence.”

Therefore, I would welcome the Minister's giving some attention to that in his remarks later in the debate.

Mr S Anderson: I welcome the opportunity to take part in this debate. The motion and the amendment give us an opportunity to highlight an issue that is not new, by any means. Carjacking was once very common in Northern Ireland. Since the turn of this year, carjacking has once again become flavour of the month among thugs and gangsters. Like a lot of antisocial behaviour, such as rioting and so on, once there has been one or two carjackings, the whole thing suddenly spirals out of control and there are copycat attacks.

However, whatever the reason, the ongoing spate of carjacking incidents since the start of this year has struck

fear into drivers in Belfast and, indeed, across the entire community. There have been 25 incidents since Christmas, and, as has been said, many of the victims, including the Member for South Belfast Ms Anna Lo, have been women. She now knows at first hand the reality of what we are all talking about here today. I hope that she has got over her ordeal, and I wish her well.

We all feel threatened by this catalogue of terrifying, vicious and violent attacks on drivers. Once again, we are being held to ransom by thugs. Violence of any sort against persons or property is completely unacceptable in any civilised society, and no member of the public should be subjected to the trauma of being threatened and assaulted in that way.

When the current spate of attacks began, there was considerable public unease at what was seen as a poor initial response by the PSNI. It is vital that the police have all the resources necessary to do their job effectively and to tackle crime on all fronts. In fairness to the PSNI, it seems to have intensified its efforts, and it now appears to be tackling the problem with greater vigour. I pay tribute to the three officers who were injured when they gave chase to a car that was stolen from a young woman in south Belfast, and I also wish them well.

Yesterday's 'News Letter' carried a very interesting report about the work of the PSNI's auto crime unit and the setting up of a special operational team in January. That is also very welcome, but we need to see positive results.

The public also have a vital role to play, and we must all assist the police in whatever way we can. It is vital that arrests are made, and I welcome that there have been some arrests. More importantly, the culprits must be charged and brought before the courts.

That leads me to the amendment, which calls for tougher sentencing. I have said it before, and I will say it again: there is no greater deterrent to criminal activity than the threat of a substantive and robust sentence. Members can talk and debate and argue until they are blue in the face. We can all call on the police to act, and so they should, and we can call on the Minister to act, and so he should, but we can act as well. We really need to take whatever action is necessary to introduce criminal justice legislation that will make it clear that crime, particularly violent crime, will be punished by a tough sentence. That will not only deter the criminal but will go a long way towards enhancing public confidence in policing and justice.

The motion suggests that the Minister should develop a strategy to tackle the carjacking problem. That makes sense. The problem might fade as a result of police efforts, and I really hope that it does, but it will not go away. Therefore, we need to devise and develop a strategy.

The motion also refers to bail and bail conditions. That is clearly a relevant issue, and it might form part of an overall review of carjacking, but it is an area that will need careful management so that we do not interfere in the bail operations and decisions of the court.

Finally, I will touch on a couple of the other side effects of carjacking. We recently debated the rising cost of car insurance premiums, and I fear that carjacking will only give the insurance industry another reason, or, indeed, excuse,

to raise those premiums even further. There will also be an adverse effect on our retail, hospitality and tourism industries if this spate of carjackings is allowed to continue and is not brought to a swift end.

Members of the public will not want to risk driving and parking in Belfast city centre when they could have their cars taken from them. Some might even use public transport instead, but I suspect that there will be a detrimental effect on that, too, at a time when the economy can ill afford further knocks.

I support the motion and the amendment.

Mr B McCrea: There is no doubt that the public are fearful of the crime of carjacking. Picking up on Mr Anderson's point, I spoke to a lady in my constituency who has decided to use public transport because she is fearful that, if she is in the car, something horrible may happen to her. I have to say that the chances of that may be relatively modest, but the fear is there. We have to be careful about how we address the issue.

I was struck by the contribution of Anna Lo, who has had experience of this. She has our support and best wishes. She provided a very interesting insight into how we should tackle the matter.

The fundamental issue is not whether carjacking is a crime; it is what we can do to stop it. There are those in the Chamber who argue, as they argue on almost every issue, that we need tougher sentences and to throw the book at offenders. Others wonder whether such an approach is effective. If it worked, why would we not do it? No one wants crime. The response to that argument, however, is that the police strategy for tackling crime at the moment is, on the face of it, successful because crime figures are down. The police's performance is improving, but, sadly, that message is not getting through to the public.

To those who ask for tougher sentences, I say that the issue is not one on which there should be a general discussion in a place like this, in which an amendment can be tagged on to a motion. If you really believe in tougher sentences, bring in legislation. Sadly, the Chair of the Justice Committee is not here at the moment, but he is certainly in a position to do so. I understand that Jonathan Bell also wanted to introduce tougher sentences and was going to introduce a private Member's Bill to do so. So let us have no more of the old talk; let us have some action. If you really believe that that is the way forward, let us deal with it. However, in doing so, Members may like to consider certain issues. Colum Eastwood quoted Tony Blair, but he might also have quoted Hazel Blears, who, when Home Secretary, was asked whether there were any plans to introduce a specific offence of carjacking. She said no, because many other offences already covered that crime: in particular, robbery contrary to section 8(1) of the Theft Act 1968, for which the maximum custodial sentence is life imprisonment. If you are asking yourselves what that means, read the detail of that legislation, which is already in place:

"A person is guilty of robbery if he steals, and immediately before or at the time of doing so, and in order to do so, he uses force on any person or puts or seeks to put any person in fear of being then and there subjected to force."

Surely that covers the majority of issues that we are looking at here.

I hope that I will not misquote her, but I read that Ms McCann talked about whether we should look at bail conditions. Such questions should be part of a general discussion. There should be a presumption of bail for people under the age of 18 because that is the law. That is how to improve the situation and not make matters worse. That is a point which Ms Lo brought up. We have to consider properly the appropriate way to deal with such matters. My friend Mr Hussey is, as he said himself, not normally known for being on the lenient side, but he made some very coherent arguments about whether that would be the right way forward, or whether it might be better to let the police do their job. It is not for the Minister of Justice to come forward with a strategy; it is for the police and the Policing Board. They should institute the proper way of dealing with such matters. That is paying dividends.

When it comes to the question of the correct response, we are all concerned about any form of aggravated robbery or burglary. The question is what do we do about it? The amendment does not add anything. We are also concerned —

4.45 pm

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

Mr B McCrea: If pressed, we will support the amendment, but only because we do not want to send out the wrong message. However, it is really a police matter, and we support the police.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the proposer of the motion. It is a timely motion on a serious public issue that has struck fear into the lives of many people living in the greater Belfast area. There is no doubt that we were all touched by the attack — that is what it was — on our colleague Anna Lo. She acted very bravely in confronting the attempted hijacking of her car and the person who was attempting to carry out that despicable attack on her and her property. Others have acted in a similar fashion.

Clearly, this is a very serious problem. I am not certain that the problem will simply be solved by the Minister of Justice talking from the Dispatch Box today. It is the action of the PSNI that will bring this problem under control and curb those who are trying to carry out such criminal acts.

The greatest deterrent for criminals is the fear of detection. The creation of the task force by the PSNI is a very positive step towards the detection of such criminals. When they are caught, they should face the fullest rigour of the law, because this is such a despicable criminal activity.

Comparisons with joyriding some years ago are not quite correct. Joyriding was a phenomenon associated with young people and was done for various reasons, but I believe that this phenomenon is carried out by professional criminals. That is because those professional criminals can no longer access cars due to the technological advances: you cannot start a car without a proper key, and it is very difficult to gain entry to a car, such is the security of locks and locking systems. So, there are all sorts of technological reasons why serious criminals cannot access cars and take them away.

Mr B McCrea: I support what the Member is saying. I draw attention to the fact that a similar case arises for aggravated burglary, where burglars steal keys from the

house so that they can get to the car. There is a similar traumatic experience for the victims.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr A Maginness: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I agree entirely with what Mr McCrea said. That is another way that hardened, professional criminals use to gain access to vehicles for whatever purposes. Perhaps, they want to spirit them away, across the border or to Scotland or England, or use them for robberies or other serious criminal offences. Accessing people's homes to steal the keys and the cars is just another aspect of this phenomenon. Hardened criminals are carrying out such activities.

I do not believe that this is some sort of youthful phenomenon such as joyriding, which was successfully addressed by the community in conjunction with effective policing and the youth justice system.

We should send out a strong message to the judicial authorities emphasising the seriousness with which we view this matter, the fear that has been struck into the community and the need for deterrent sentences to try to curb those despicable acts. Therefore, we will support the amendment.

I believe that the judiciary will be sensitive and will hear the voice of legislators and public representatives in the Assembly. It is important that they do hear that voice and that we make sure that we highlight this matter to the judiciary. Naturally, it is up to them to exercise their discretion, but it is important for us to emphasise to them the fear and hurt in the community and that people have been seriously affected as a result of the psychological trauma —

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

Mr A Maginness: — as well as the physical trauma of being attacked and hurt, and the serious financial detriment as a result of insurance and so forth being affected.

Mr Wells: I was in Ballycastle 15 years ago. I managed to break the key of my car when I tried to open my wife's blue Ford Fiesta. A young gentleman, who originated from west Belfast, approached me and said, "You're having trouble getting into your car." I said, "I am." He said, "Will you let me do it?" Within 30 seconds, he was into my car, had broken the steering lock, had produced a screwdriver from I don't know where, and had the car going. I said to him, "Have you done this before?" He said, "Somebody told me how to do this."

I drove the car for the next three weeks using the screwdriver to turn it on and off. That is how simple it was to do carjacking 15 or 20 years ago. Since then, fortunately, we have developed car safety devices to ensure that it would be almost impossible for that young lad to break in and get a car going today. Clearly, however, there are still lots of young men out there — they are, of course, as far as I know, almost entirely young men — who get their kicks from stealing a car, driving it in a mad way and then leaving it, often burned out, particularly in areas such as west Belfast.

Indeed, in my South Down constituency, a gang of young men from west Belfast were regularly left off in Newcastle and the trick was that the first to arrive back at a certain point in west Belfast in a stolen car was the winner. Often, the individual who brought them to Newcastle was overtaken

by several of them on the way home in stolen cars as they passed him to go back to west Belfast with their trophy of a car.

Mr P Maskey: Having looking through the research and, as I said earlier, having been at a district policing partnership meeting in west Belfast last night, I am conscious that this crime is right across the North. It is not prolific in only west Belfast, so it is a major issue. I am just wondering where the Member is getting his information. If he has information on individuals racing up and down from Newcastle and other places, maybe he should come forward to the PSNI with that information.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Wells: I certainly have, and I would urge any Member with information to make it available to the PSNI. He keeps referring to the North. I assume he means Northern Ireland, leaving Donegal out of it.

I have to say that, with regard to my constituency, for the vast bulk of people who had their cars stolen in South Down, those cars ended up in west Belfast. We need to call a spade a spade here.

My vehicle was stolen outside Queen's University when I was a student. It ended up at the top of the Glen Road. I rang the police and said, "I am going to collect my car. When are you coming with me?" They said, "No, we are not going with you to the top of the Glen Road to collect the car. You are going on your own, though we will put you in contact with a gentleman who specialises in recovery." That was simply because they realised that packages would be left under the seat etc as booby traps for the police if they started accompanying people to collect their cars. Those individuals are carrying out a crime. I hate the word "joyrider". There is no joy in this.

Women who are driving around south Belfast are terrorised by the prospect of having their car attacked, losing their vehicle and being left on the street in the dark on their own. Unless those individuals place themselves in the position of women on their own, they will not realise just how frightening an experience that it is. Therefore, I commend the decision of the Member for South Belfast Anna Lo to go public in explaining the terror that she endured in the awful situation that arose in her constituency. I hope that others have the courage to do that as well.

People are left in a very vulnerable position, but the difficulty is not only that people are terrorised when they lose their car. Serious road accidents are often caused as a result of the stolen cars. There have been many examples in Northern Ireland of totally innocent people being mown down and killed as a result of the extremely antisocial activity of car hijacking.

The reason why sentencing is important is the new trend. We have gone from the straight breaking in and driving off to the creeper burglar who breaks into a house and steals car keys, which is an utterly terrifying position for the people concerned to be in. We all remember the dreadful incident on the upper Malone Road in which a gentleman was almost killed with a hammer. We have now moved to the next facet of the crime: stealing the vehicle when the owner is present. Through sentencing, we need to send out a very clear and immediate message that society condemns, and is repulsed by, this crime and will take it extremely seriously.

After the London riots of August 2011, the vast majority of the perpetrators were brought in within days, and very heavy, stiff sentences were imposed on most of them. It was done almost overnight. That sent out a very clear message on behalf of the people of London and other conurbations in Great Britain that society will not tolerate looting, rioting and arson. I am glad that some carjackers have been caught already. When we get those individuals, we, too, have to send out a very clear signal, through sentencing, that this is serious and that we will not tolerate it. We have to make an example of the young individuals responsible so that they see that society will not tolerate for one moment this type of antisocial and vicious crime.

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I add my congratulations to Mr Maskey and his colleagues for securing the debate. I join all those who have taken part in the debate in unreservedly condemning the crime of hijacking, car hijacking, carjacking or whatever we choose to call it. As Jim Wells just highlighted, it is a crime that is perpetrated with extreme violence against entirely innocent people going about their lawful business.

To the end of last week, we have had 23 incidents of carjacking this year, predominantly in central, south and west Belfast. For each individual who has been subjected to the crime, it has been a horrific event that has caused fear, stress, worry, perhaps the loss of goods as well as the car, and financial hardship. Anna Lo highlighted her own experience in a way that all of us have to pay attention to. I will update Paul Maskey's statistics slightly. So far, there have been 20 arrests specifically for carjacking, and eight people have been charged. In total, there have been 92 arrests by the police team acting against the carjackers.

While the investigation of those crimes is quite properly one for the Chief Constable and the Police Service, which is accountable to the Policing Board and not directly to me, I spoke informally to the Chief Constable last week and had a formal meeting with him yesterday to discuss the issue. The Chief Constable has reassured me of how seriously the Police Service is taking the spate of attacks. They have put in place additional resources, as has been well highlighted by other Members and in the media, and a high-level command oversight to deal with the crime wave that we currently face. They have also devoted significantly more resources to tackling the problem and adopted a higher profile on the streets in certain hotspot areas. The result is that we have had a significant number of charges and arrests for similar activities.

The motion calls for a strategy aimed at curbing the crime of carjacking. However, I do not believe that the Executive need to agree a specific strategy to target carjacking because we have a number of strategies in place that will effect that.

5.00 pm

Members, particularly those on the Justice Committee, will be aware that I hope to publish in the coming weeks a community safety strategy, one of the key themes of which is making communities feel safe by providing more confidence in the agencies that serve them. The strategy will include outcomes around improving community confidence in the ability of all the criminal justice agencies to respond to and tackle issues of concern such as this. It will also include outcomes around understanding and dealing with the fear of crime, particularly amongst the most

vulnerable, because, in many cases, the fear of crime is as great as the crime itself. The strategy will also include outcomes around community engagement to identify and address local priority crime issues.

Critical to the success of that strategy will be the work of the new policing and community safety partnerships, which will work with a range of partner agencies, including the Police Service, to deliver solutions to the different local problems that they identify. PCSPs have two main objectives that are particularly relevant to this debate. The first is to improve community safety by tackling crime and antisocial behaviour, and the second relates to improving community confidence in policing. Those objectives will be achieved by a number of actions, including the preparation of a local plan to meet the priority needs expressed by the local community and other partners. It is not for me to suggest what local priorities should be in a given area. That will be for those who know the needs of their area at a particular time.

As different priority issues emerge over the coming years, be they carjacking, ATM attacks or metal theft, the Police Service will provide the operational response, but the community safety strategy will help to ensure a joined-up approach, with agencies working in partnership at a strategic and local level. There is clearly a key issue there around the personal policing role, which the Chief Constable has done so much to highlight, and which was referred to by Colum Eastwood. I certainly endorse his remarks about community policing, though not necessarily his quoting Tony Blair.

I accept that there is a very real issue of fear in the community, especially amongst the vulnerable, those who consider themselves to be vulnerable and those who live in or need to drive through areas that are seen as having particular difficulties. Again, fear of crime will be a key issue for the PCSPs to address.

Although there has been a spike in car hijackings recently, it is worth saying that there has been a significant overall reduction in car crime, which is down 12.7%. The overall crime trend for cars has reduced over the past 10 years. I will give you a couple of examples. In 1998-99, there were 9,700 thefts of vehicles, but by 2010-11, there were fewer than 2,500 such thefts. In the same period, hijackings reduced from 215 to 102. So, robust action is clearly being taken by the police and is having an effect.

During the debate, concerns were expressed about the issue of bail in particular and perhaps that does need to be explained, not in the sense of discussing individual cases but of looking at the powers and procedures available. Members should note that the police have the power to detain without charge for no more than 24 hours, unless there is authorisation of further detention, which would allow for a maximum period of 96 hours, subject to the appropriate authorisation. However, a suspect may be detained in police custody only if it is necessary to secure or preserve evidence related to the offence or to obtain such evidence by questioning the suspect. The granting of bail is a separate matter for the independent courts. It is for the judge, acting on the basis of the information before him, to take decisions in individual cases. Judges have to take account of the risk of the accused failing to appear for trial or interfering with the course of justice and the likelihood of reoffending, which includes looking at the criminal record of the accused. We also have to be very conscious of

overarching European law. There is an obligation to release people, unless particular circumstances are met.

I regularly discuss the law on bail with the Lord Chief Justice during our meetings. We should note that bail legislation was changed a few years ago to make it an offence to breach bail conditions, with a potential sentence of up to three years imprisonment. The law also now provides a police power of entry to enter premises and arrest anyone in breach of bail conditions. Prosecutors can appeal decisions on bail from a Magistrates' Court to the higher courts. Members may be interested to know that the Law Commission is about to conclude its review of the law on bail. I expect to receive the commission's report this summer, and that will clearly be an issue for the House to address.

The amendment talks about increasing sentences. As a number of Members have said, under current legislation, the maximum sentence that is available for hijacking a vehicle is already 15 years' imprisonment. Certainly, there have been criticisms of the Department for the level of sentences that are handed out. However, as other Members have pointed out, it is clear that that is a matter entirely for the judiciary. In that context, I am slightly baffled by some of those who talk about the role of the judiciary and, yet, suggest that the amendment would meet that. It appears to me that the amendment asks the House to increase the maximum sentence when the key issue is seeing how sentences currently operate.

Mr G Kelly: The amendment says "including introducing tougher sentences". Although I accept that it does not actually mention legislation, perhaps it should have said "including tougher sentencing". That means that sentences could be increased within the bounds of current law. That is the crux of the matter. The law exists at present. However, sentencing is not being used in a way that is appropriate to those crimes.

Mr Ford: I take Mr Kelly's point. Unfortunately, I am going by the words that are on the paper in front of me. Perhaps, at this point, I should give some indication of recent sentencing. In the past two years, 26 people have been convicted of hijacking. One person received three years' probation. All the others received a custodial sentence. Three people received sentences of less than one year; 14 received sentences of between a year and two years; and seven received sentences of over two years. One person received a total sentence of six years when there were also other offences. It is up to Members to decide what representations they may wish to make with regard to the judiciary's application of a maximum sentence of 15 years.

We also need to be careful that, as a House, we do not seek to go beyond our role to deal with sentencing in individual cases. Of course, the Lord Chief Justice has been doing work on sentencing guidelines and has sought public comment on which particular sentences should be considered early. I have no doubt that if that crime attracts particular concerns, Members could make representations to the Lord Chief Justice for the inclusion of sentences for car hijacking in his work. Sentences can be set only on the basis of judicial decisions within the parameters that are set by the law. It is not for the Department of Justice to seek to influence any individual case.

Sentencing is complex. It is emotive. It is an issue on which, undoubtedly, all of us will have an opinion. Indeed, many of us have expressed one today. I also need to see that we look at a range of potential mechanisms to get greater transparency and consistency in sentencing, along with the work that is being done by the Lord Chief Justice on sentencing guidelines. I hope that further proposals will be announced in the near future.

In developing an agenda for reform, I want to build a fair, just and safe society. That needs a major initiative to reduce long-term offending. There has been particular mention of prolific offenders during the debate. The police have advised me that although many of those who have been arrested recently have been involved in other low-level crime, some of those who have been arrested had no previous criminal history at all. I advise the House that my Department is developing a strategic framework for reducing offending that is based firmly on international research that sets out how the Government and their partners can reduce crime and offending. The strategic framework focuses on preventing people's becoming involved in criminal behaviour in the first instance and reoffending by those who come into contact with the justice system.

One key theme is reducing opportunities to commit crime, which focuses on making Northern Ireland a more difficult place in which to commit crime and should contribute to a reduction in the number of crimes. Of course, Members have highlighted how, as cars have become safer with improved locks, that may, perhaps, have resulted in increased hijacking crimes. The framework for reducing offending will not be a quick fix. It will address a broad range of issues and will take time to implement. While that is being done, the Police Service is working to tackle reoffending by targeting the most prolific offenders in each policing district. I am committed to ensuring that that partnership works with the Police Service and others at a regional and local level as we address that and other awful crimes.

I want to address a couple of points that were raised by Members who asked me specific questions. Mr Givan asked about an individual's right to defend his or her property. I think that it is fair to say that the use of a flamethrower on a car would not be acceptable in this jurisdiction. The precise detail is, perhaps, something that the Committee may wish to explore with departmental officials. Basil McCrea and Anna Lo talked about the issue to which I just —

Mr Givan: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. Of course, he did not want to elaborate on my saying that I did not advocate that as a method of defending yourself. However, my point about reasonable force and what the law's view of that would be when defending your car from being stolen is relevant.

Mr Ford: I apologise to the Member for not acknowledging his point, and I am delighted to know that there is a limit to how far to the right wing the DUP will go in those matters. The concept of reasonable force is a genuine and serious issue. However, reasonable force is well understood in common law, and it is a matter for each individual in each circumstance to consider what that might be.

Basil McCrea and Anna Lo talked about the effective work to reduce crime. Interestingly, references were made to an article in 'The Irish News' last week by Breidge Gadd,

speaking from her experience as Chief Probation Officer, about the level of detailed and in-depth work done to deter young people from crime. Her view is, I suspect, closer to reality, although not necessarily to what we would all instinctively jump to, than Newton Emerson's article the previous day, which Ross Hussey quoted.

For Mr McCrea's benefit and to keep him right, I inform him that, in Northern Ireland, car hijacking is prosecuted under section 2(1)(a) of the Criminal Jurisdiction Act 1975, not the GB legislation that he quoted.

As Alban Maginness and others said, it is not an issue for just the Minister to address; it is an issue for the justice system as a whole to address in a variety of ways. I hope that Members will encourage everyone involved in that justice system, including those on the Policing Board and those on the Justice Committee, to ensure that they play their part in building a joined-up solution that meets this crime. I also encourage any member of the public who has information that could help to catch those thugs to give it to the police or Crimestoppers, which is offering a reward of £1,000. We also need to encourage motorists to be extremely careful and to heed the security advice given by the Police Service. If there is joined-up working between the police, the other criminal justice agencies and the community, I believe that we will beat this crime.

Mr Craig: I take great pleasure in supporting the motion and the amendment put forward by my party. I will not get into the semantics of whether the word should be "sentences" or "sentencing". Quite frankly, we are plagued with the problem, which has moved on from joyriding, to breaking into houses to steal keys, to the euphemistically termed "carjacking". As the police pointed out, the problem has come about because modern cars create the desire to hijack cars. As Jim Wells said earlier, the truth is that it is nigh on impossible to break into a car now and successfully steal it. Unfortunately, the criminals have moved on to something worse: they threaten individuals, such as the honourable Member Anna Lo, take their keys and take off in their cars.

Unfortunately for all of us, the crime is not that different to what it was in the past. There is an element of theft to all of it. Criminals steal valuables from the cars, and that was always the case. However, the simple truth is that many steal cars to go joyriding or, as it was more accurately described, "death riding". That is why, as a Chamber, we need to take this very seriously. It is becoming prolific. The statistics for this year are that there have been more than 23 carjackings; 20 arrests; 21 proactive searches, which led to a further 65 arrests; and between 40 and 60 police officers have been involved in the carjacking task force. They are now targeting 102 priority offenders.

5.15 pm

I can only speak for myself and other Members who sit on the Policing Board when I say that we are taking this issue seriously. I have personally been involved in six meetings at which the only topic on the agenda was carjacking and how we can tackle it. We were actually in a meeting discussing that very issue when the news came through about Anna Lo's attempted carjacking. We are taking it seriously and are putting the police under huge pressure to deliver.

The police can put resources into combating this crime. They can bring helicopters in, target individuals and certain areas where that crime is prolific and arrest the individuals responsible. However, as you know all too well Minister — you pointed it out — there are specific rules on how long the police can keep individuals in custody. The police are only allowed to detain those individuals for 24 hours, with a further 12 hours allowed if an officer at the level of superintendent can authorise it. There is always a question mark over whether that extra time in custody can be authorised. In many cases, that is not long enough to get the specific evidence that can put those people away.

Some people have commented on how right wing DUP Members are. However, for the first time ever, I have discovered someone in the Chamber who is more right wing than me. I speak of Ross Hussey, who said that we should throw those offenders straight into jail, forget about the PACE regulations, only bring them back out for sentencing and then throw them back into jail again. I have an awful lot of sympathy for the sentiments held in that. However, the Member also referred to the conundrum that exists between proof and justice. I amused myself with the thought that there is someone in the Ulster Unionist Party who is more right wing than me. However, that was totally contradicted by his colleague Basil —

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

Mr Craig: — who said that he would not support our amendment. Not for the first time, Members of the Ulster Unionist Party have contradicted themselves. I commend our amendment and the motion to the House.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am very glad to speak on the motion that my colleague Paul Maskey proposed. I hope that everyone in the Chamber will send out a united message that we want to see this crime taken on and want to put those who are responsible through the judicial system and make sure that they face the full rigours of the law.

In his opening remarks, my colleague Paul Maskey talked about the lack of public confidence, and all Members who spoke referred to that also. There is a real lack of public confidence, and women in particular are very afraid. Several women friends of mine are frightened to go out in their cars to bring their children to school in the morning or go to a garage on their own to buy petrol or diesel. This crime is really putting a sense of fear into women in communities across Belfast and beyond.

The revolving door that prolific offenders go through was also referred to. I must say to the Minister that I have evidence of people who have been charged with a crime and who have been released on bail, only for them to be rearrested for another crime and released on bail again. I do not understand how that system works, and I feel that we should look at it in more detail.

My colleague Paul Maskey also mentioned that some good work has been done by the PSNI's auto crime team. He and other Members said that this crime is not joyriding but death riding. It should be called that, because numerous families have been bereaved by people who steal cars. No matter how they steal them, they go out on the roads and innocent people end up dead. Paul Maskey mentioned Families Bereaved Through Car Crime, which has done a lot

to highlight the problem and to bring forward programmes to combat it.

Everyone commented on Anna Lo's experience, and I join with them. She has to be commended for standing up to those people.

A task force has, thankfully, been set up, but, as my colleague said, that happened only as a result of local, community and political representatives, along with publicity, focusing on the problem and saying that enough is enough. We now need to make sure that that task force is resourced. Many Members talked about people being released on police bail, saying that the police can hold individuals only for a limited time. That applies particularly to those who are arrested close to a crime scene and to the fact that although the police know that those people are connected to that scene, they do not have the evidence to hold them. In those cases, we need to ensure that forensic evidence, or whatever evidence is needed to hold people in custody and charge them, is gathered more quickly. So, resources are needed to allow the PSNI to do that.

David McIlveen talked about the fear that some people, particularly women, experience when they go out in their cars. He used drink-driving as a comparison and said that drivers know that if they are caught drink-driving, they will lose their licence. He said that a similar deterrent is required to deal with carjackers and that we need to work closely with the judiciary and the PSNI to sort out the issue.

I do not know why Ross Hussey used the time that he had to go into the details that he gave in his speech. He quoted Newton Emerson and talked about different things.

Colum Eastwood said that the problem needs to be tackled sensitively and systematically. He said that there needs to be a better relationship between the PSNI and the community and the justice system, because it needs to work. He outlined some of the social causes of car crime in our communities. He said that community policing needs to be visible and that people need to feel secure.

Anna Lo outlined her experiences, and we all felt for her. She talked about a constituent whose car was burnt out and she discussed more than just the trauma of the incident. It is important to remember that many people lose personal belongings, including car keys and details of their home address, which can result in their homes being burgled later. Those are the other losses that we need to look at as well. She went on to talk about young people who are involved in those types of crimes. I have to say that there is a clear difference between young people who are caught up in these crimes for the first time and prolific offenders who have been through the courts time and time again and have been let out on bail and rearrested. We need to make the distinction that there are disaffected young people who get caught up in such incidents and who need to be treated a bit differently. I think that everyone would acknowledge that.

Paul Givan said that although carjacking incidents have happened primarily in Belfast and the greater Belfast area, it is important that any strategy or plan to tackle the problem is rolled out across the North. He probably would not call it the North, but he said that about a strategy. He is right: any such strategy needs to be effective across every part of the North. He said that it is very wrong that people get out on

bail time and time again, and he also said that the justice system needs to be seen to be working for people.

Barry McElduff said that a few incidents have taken place in Carrickmore and Coalisland in his constituency, which is in a rural area. He detailed how a young man's car was taken recently. He said that, in a rural setting, it is even more of an inconvenience for people because of the lack of public transport. There is a dependence on cars, and he said that we need some sort of a strategy to tackle the problem in rural areas as well.

Sydney Anderson talked about the vicious and violent threats that are used, and he talked about the PSNI's auto crime unit. He also said that we need to work together to ensure that the criminal justice legislation that is needed is brought forward.

Mr G Kelly: Will the Member give way?

Ms J McCann: Yes.

Mr G Kelly: On that point about bringing legislation forward, I return to the amendment. The problem is not that we need a deeper maximum sentence of 20 years. Currently, the maximum sentence is 15 years, but the sentences that the Minister read out were all less than two years. It is not the police who give out the sentences but the judiciary, and we need some sort of pressure to make the sentence fit the crime. That is what we are dealing with. With a maximum sentence of 20 years, the judiciary could still give out sentences of less than a year.

Ms J McCann: My colleague has made a valid point. We need to use the legislation that is there. There is probably enough legislation already, and we need to use it to ensure that there is a deterrent.

Basil McCrea said that he did not feel that the amendment added to the motion but that he would not divide the House on it. Alban Maginness said that it is a very serious problem and was not certain that it could be totally solved by the Minister, and he said that we need a holistic approach to this. He called the people who carry this out professional criminals. Jim Wells said that people in south Down have also been victims of this crime.

I will go on to some of the Minister's comments, and I am conscious of time. He mentioned the arrests, and, as my colleague said, we need to use the existing legislation. The sentences for 26 convictions together did not add up to 15 years.

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

Ms J McCann: In closing, this is a very serious debate. Everyone who contributed to it spoke well, and we need to send out a clear message to the people that this crime will not be tolerated, that we will be united in that and that we will say that we will —

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

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

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Justice to respond to public concerns about the recent pattern of carjackings, particularly in relation to the role of prolific offenders and the conditions on which they are given bail; and further calls on the Minister to develop and resource a strategy to curb this crime and engender public confidence, including introducing tougher sentences.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask Members to take their ease for a few moments.

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

Private Members' Business

Undeveloped Sites

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

5.30 pm

Miss M McIlveen: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes that there are a number of sites in urban areas where buildings or other structures have been demolished or removed pending future development and that neither local councils nor the Health and Safety Executive has the power to require that they are made secure; and calls on the Minister of the Environment to bring forward proposals to empower local councils to require that sites which contain no existing buildings or structures and are awaiting development be made secure.

First of all, I want to indicate my support for the amendment. The debate should be widened out to deal with other blight issues, and the amendment certainly complements the intention behind the motion.

Like my previous motion on surety bonds, this motion is about ensuring that developers act responsibly and that a process and powers are put in place to make that happen. However, it goes a little further than that. Local councils have certain powers though their environmental health departments to force land and property owners and occupiers to take steps to tidy up and secure premises. In practice, there are significant limits to those powers, and that has been acknowledged through written answers from the Minister of the Environment, who I am pleased to note will respond today.

There are a number of areas in my own constituency — and I have no doubt that it is the case throughout Northern Ireland — where sites are lying unsecured. Sometimes, that is just because there is an additional portion of land at the end of a site where materials were left during building or where the builder's Portakabin was situated or because areas have been cleared in readiness for development. In today's economic climate, with its devastating impact on the building trade, the latter example is very prevalent. Some may have ineffective fencing around them, while others may have no fencing at all.

However, it appears however that local councils have no powers to secure undeveloped greenfield sites but do have powers where sites contain existing buildings and structures awaiting development. That gap is not filled by the Health and Safety Executive either, and that was confirmed by the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. That inability

on the part of local authorities means that action that could be seen as preventative cannot be taken, and, while some landowners may take the advice of their insurers and erect fencing or take other measures to limit liability, some do not, or, in some cases, the measures taken have become ineffective through damage or general wear and tear. There is a danger that children, or even adults who are using the area as a shortcut, may get in and hurt themselves. Sites such as that may not be flattened, may contain rubble and other building debris or may have holes, and the news yesterday of the death of a toddler in Athlone on an unfinished site brings the potential human cost into sharp focus.

The sites can also be a magnet for youths to gather, and that, in turn, can lead to antisocial behaviour problems such as drinking and fire-setting, which can be a danger to the neighbouring properties and, understandably, annoying for local residents. Often, those areas not only have building debris left on them but become sites for other illegal dumping. If the waste left behind is inert, the local council can do little about it. It can only step in if there is potential for a public health problem — for instance, if food waste has been left that might attract vermin. That was of particular concern at a location in Newtownards, but that issue has, fortunately, been rectified. Although those problems are located on sites that are lying vacant, it needs to be borne in mind that they will, in the majority of cases, be next to people's homes. Those people have pride in where they live, and it can be deeply frustrating for them for such sites to be located next to or near their homes.

No doubt, many in this Chamber have been in contact with local councils about similar issues after complaints from residents. I know, from speaking to Ards Borough Council, that the number of calls on matters on which they do not have the power to step in are in the region of dozens each year. If that is multiplied across the other council areas, it is clear that there is a considerable problem.

That brings me to the issue of partially developed sites, which is the subject of the amendment. While Northern Ireland has not fallen victim to the ghost estates that blight the Irish Republic, it would be wrong to say that there is not a problem. That is compounded by a lack of powers for local councils, which cannot act where building work has been abandoned unless the building is dangerous and near to a road. Often, the sites are set back from the road and are, therefore, not a danger to a passer-by. It seems pertinent to tighten up legislation on this to prevent possible injury to children who might see it as an adventure to go wandering into such a site. Work has ground to a halt on a large number of those sites, and the Minister has acknowledged in his written answer that he is fully aware of the problems.

The argument and primary thrust of the motion is to call for powers to be conferred on local councils to require that all necessary and reasonable steps be taken by landowners or occupiers to ensure that such sites are secure so that problems such as the risk of injury, antisocial behaviour and illegal dumping can be minimised. Even the powers that councils do have may not be being used to their maximum. That is where the Minister's officials could step in to provide clarification of phrases in the legislation such as:

“seriously detrimental to the amenities of the neighbourhood”.

Most councils, being prudent about the use of ratepayers' money, will not want to risk testing those definitions, and clear guidelines in that instance would be immensely beneficial.

Having said all that and pressed for an extension of those powers to local councils, something that environmental health officers would welcome, there is a brick wall — if you will pardon the pun — when it comes to developers who are in administration. In such cases, local councils can issue whatever notices they like under the current legislation, but they are unenforceable under the insolvency laws. When a company is in administration there is a moratorium on insolvency and other legal proceedings.

During my research for the debate I was shocked to discover that, in relation to a site on Harbour Road, Portavogie, the council finds itself powerless to enforce a public health notice for clearing up asbestos on the site because the developer is in administration, despite reports that children have been seen jumping up and down on it. Although I appreciate that a change in the insolvency laws is not in the gift of the Minister, it has been suggested that it would be of great assistance if an amendment requiring administrators to comply with statutory notices was made. As has been pointed out to me, such notices are not issued without good reason. Although the moratorium on legal proceedings while a company is in administration has a sound practical basis, allowing an exception in relation to statutory notices is similarly logical.

One final issue that I would like to raise, which is not totally unrelated to the matters that I have mentioned so far concerning enforcement difficulties faced by local councils, is the issue of dilapidated and ruinous properties. There is a recurring problem with dilapidated sites where councils are finding it difficult to trace the owners because of a lack of registration. There are a number of possible reasons for that situation to have arisen. For example, perhaps the property has changed hands without the proper steps being taken to register it with the Land Registry or Registry of Deeds, or possibly the owner died intestate many years ago and it was never realised that that person owned it. Whatever the reason, problems can arise, and have arisen. I have been made aware of a number of properties in the Ards Borough Council area where that is the case, and it is a cause of frustration on the part of officers who want to deal with dilapidated properties.

Sections 65 and 66 of the Pollution Control and Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 state that local councils need to serve notices on the owners of the defective, dilapidated or ruinous premises. Obviously, if those cannot be served, a problem arises. Environmental health officers feel that they cannot act unless they serve those notices. Belfast City Council is slightly different, it seems. Under section 76 of the Belfast Corporation Act 1911, the city council has the power, if the owner is unknown, to affix a notice to the dilapidated property prior to applying to the court for an order to demolish, repair or secure the property without any notice being served on the owner or occupier of the building. The Minister may consider that to be an option for other local councils.

Another aspect that the Minister may wish to look at relates to planning permission for demolition of those buildings, particularly where an order has been obtained from a court

for demolition. It may be that the demolition application can be fast-tracked or, in the case of a court order demolition, exempt from application. I know that that is an area of interest to the Minister, and I ask that he instruct his officials to speak to local councils to identify what they feel they need. There is frustration on the part of councils and of residents.

In all of that, of course, the cost to the ratepayer must be addressed. I would like to see that, if there was new legislation forthcoming to address those problems, the costs would lie with the party at fault and, if action related to a property where the owner could not be identified, that a charge could be fixed against the property. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

Mr Kinahan: I beg to move the following amendment: Leave out all after the second "to require that" and insert

"incomplete sites and derelict buildings be made secure."

I am very pleased to speak on the motion and I congratulate Miss McIlveen and Mr Weir on tabling it. I am grateful to them for supporting our amendment because I was extremely keen to expand the motion to include other matters. The main motion calls on the Minister to empower councils and, therefore, we are calling on him for stronger legislation. Through our amendment, we want to secure incomplete sites and derelict buildings. I hope that the motion, as amended, lets us do that.

In my brief time in council, the problem has changed from age-old derelicts that muck up towns and villages, stopping them from tempting people to invest and stopping people from being able to use the buildings, to the more recent complication of unfinished but new developments. I started as a councillor six years ago, and one of the first things I got involved with was Crumlin town centre, which we wanted to do up and revitalise. We looked at lighting, car parking, holes, and, eventually, we got to derelicts and how we were going to make them look presentable and do them up. We just wanted to give them a facelift and to get some paint on the front of the buildings. We could not find seven of the owners, and it took us months to establish who they were.

In Ballyclare at the moment, at the bottom of the town, there are two fenced-off areas that are full of weeds and litter. They are damaged and are an eyesore. That is at the entrance to the town, which should show off Ballyclare as people arrive. It gives completely the wrong image. We have the same problem concerning owners: this time, not the problem of knowing who they are, but finding that there are numerous owners. We need to find a way to target and make sure that councils know who the owners are so that we can talk to the right people when we are enforcing these matters.

In Antrim, well before I was a councillor, I was involved in trying to deal with the Ulster Bar corner, which was fenced off in the centre of the town, and just became another place that gathered litter and weeds, and became an eyesore. In that case, it suffered from having two separate owners, both in government: one was the education board and the other, I think, was the Housing Executive. We could not get agreement on what to do with the site. Therefore, the first thing we are looking for is to allow councils to know who the owners of all the buildings are, so we need to find the link between Land and Property Services —

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. I agree that there needs to be a much clearer and swifter establishment of who owns which buildings. That applies not only in these situations. I was shocked when I recently saw figures from the Finance Minister about the number of buildings and properties for which ownership had not been able to be established. In some cases, they were recently built, so it may have been a matter of a time lag. However, there is also the issue that, when ownership of buildings cannot be established, it has a major implication for rating. That means that everyone else must bear a heavier burden.

Mr Kinahan: That is a particularly good point. We need a very slick and dynamic system for finding out who the owners are.

When the downturn came along, I moved on to something else in Antrim: Bush Manor, or Bush Ford, as it was originally called — a good, new, high-grade housing development, with some 350 upmarket houses, which was to have a nice, green play area in the middle and was nearly a gated community in that it had one main entrance. It was going to be kept as an individual high-grade development. It was near Antrim Area Hospital, the M2 motorway, and should have been finished in no time and sold extremely quickly. However, the downturn came on us, we had three large areas unfinished, the developer, sadly, had gone bust, and it all moved to the administrator. By the time I was asked to help, we had been there for three years and had got nowhere. One issue was private roads, which has been dealt with through other means. I will not go into that in great detail, but there are shared roads, which are really driveways to people's houses, and which were not finished. To get that resolved, each householder has to get a lawyer to talk to others and come up with a plan on the way forward.

We managed to get the lighting resolved, and we managed to get bonds in to get the main roads finished. However, we were still left with three areas that were fenced off. One was what should have been the large green play area, with 10-foot fencing, all wired and strapped together. It looked fine the day it went up, but it was nice, stepped wire fencing, which was good for climbing over. If anyone hit it, it was dented, and, eventually, it fell over.

On the other side, weeds ran amok, and the fencing was eventually knocked over. There was dumping, and there were holes in the ground, some of which were full of wires and others of drainage material. In a way, it was the ideal play area for completely the wrong people. We passed the matter on to the council and to the Health and Safety Executive, but they said that they could do nothing. We must give that sort of power to councils so that they are able to deal with such areas and force developers or administrators to secure a site. Alternatively, councils should be able to make areas safe and then charge developers or administrators.

5.45 pm

The developer's office, which was housed in a Portakabin — a mobile, as some people call them — was in another area of the same site. It had all the building material — stacks of bricks, paving stones and slabs — and became a gathering point. The youth of Antrim gathered there, with their antisocial behaviour, and the idea of having a gated community collapsed completely. The local river was blocked by bricks and slabs that were thrown into it. That is why we

tabled today's amendment. We wanted to expand the motion so that we could find a way to deal with the matter.

For some of the people in Bush Manor, this has been going on for six years. They look out of their houses onto the fencing, where there should have been a play area. They cannot sell their houses, move on or find an easy way out. They cannot set up a management company to mow the grass or tidy the place up. I praise some of the residents who have gone ahead and done those things themselves.

I ask the Minister to look at the issue of better enforcement. I heard Margaret Ritchie on the radio this morning talking about the possibility of lowering rates. That is probably the right thing to do to gain votes. However, councils need their rates. The lowering of rates would open the door for everyone experiencing problems. Minister, please keep that in mind.

I wonder whether we should look at developers paying for a bond on the whole site, not just the roads. A bond on the entire development site would mean that there was some money or insurance to finish off any development.

We have heard a little bit about legislation. There is the Pollution Control and Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 1978, which contains the phrase that has already been mentioned: "seriously detrimental to the amenities" of the area. Those words could be a dream for lawyers, as they can challenge and find different ways to play with the words so that it becomes difficult for councils to have the will to take on big companies or, in many cases now, big administrators.

We also have the Public Health Acts Amendment Act 1907 and the Belfast Improvement Act 1878. The 1911 Act has already been mentioned, which Belfast also uses. There is the Occupiers' Liabilities Act (Northern Ireland) 1957; I challenge anyone to read that and understand a word. It is probably the worst bit of English I have come across. We have the Public Health and Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 1962, which is based on the 1907 Act. So the legislation goes back over 100 years, and the 1907 Act is probably the best bit of English in any of this legislation and shows us how it should be written. The Department and the Minister need to pull all that earlier legislation together with some new legislation so that we come up with something that makes it possible for councils to deal with the matter and to have the will and to be able to act.

We need new legislation and a dynamic system. We need to know who owns sites, we need to know about enforcement and how to act quickly, we need timescales, and we probably need fines. Let us consider the issue of rates, but let us also think about bonds. There are many ways to do this. Perhaps we should look at the issue of a developer, or perhaps a director, going bust and not being allowed to start work on another site. I am pleased to support the motion and the amendment.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome today's debate. Ba mhaith liom labhairt faoin rún seo agus faoin leasú. I support the motion and the amendment.

I think that the arguments have been well-rehearsed and articulated, and I do not propose to go into all of what has

been said before. Given the new and challenging economic circumstances in which we find ourselves with the downturn, we, and local councils, have been left new challenges with respect to the complexity of issues involved in dealing with the increase in dangerous and derelict buildings.

I know that the Member across the way said that there are perhaps no ghost estates in the North. I have to say that I know of some ghost estates already. Down South, they are going to review the legislation there; and this issue needs to be dealt with by legislation, which I will come to in a minute. With your indulgence, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I will use a few photographs to show examples of sites and developments that have been left. When I look at this photograph, which I will show to you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, having heard the story of the child who drowned last week in Athlone, I think that this is a prime example of what might have happened.

For your benefit, Minister: in this case, a developer got permission to build a certain number of houses. He developed 99% of them and left one in this condition. For years, we have been asking developers to provide play and recreational facilities on their developments. Now, by default, they have left a playground that is very dangerous. I want to use that as an example. The issue here is that, although building control and the council were contacted, and they then contacted the Health and Safety Executive, it could not use its powers to go on to the site because work and activity on the site has stopped. We need to take that on board when it comes to the regulations that the Health and Safety Executive works under.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I have another example of an abandoned site. Permission for a number of buildings was granted, but the firm is now in receivership, and this is how the site has been left. As you can see, there are wooden-framed houses beside a primary school. We need to find out exactly which Department, whether it is the Department of Justice, is responsible for this issue. When the banks take over some of these estates, public liability ceases, to my knowledge, and we cannot find out who is responsible for doing anything with the sites. We need to look at that issue.

I recognise the work done by Belfast City Council, and I thank the Assembly Research and Information Service for preparing a paper for the debate. A pilot project was undertaken by Belfast City Council a number of years ago, which came up with some ideas. My time is running out, but I want to quickly run through some things that could be included in new legislation. I would like the Minister to lead on the matter along with the relevant Departments that need to deal with it. There should be powers to identify ownership, recover costs and deal with dangerous structures in emergencies — we have seen what happened in Derry recently. There should be powers to deal with abandoned building sites, clear legal definitions and details of council responsibilities for work that is in default.

Minister, responsibility is across all Departments. I have mentioned the Health and Safety Executive, but there is also the Housing Executive, the Department of Justice and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI). There is a lot of responsibility involved. I would like to see a joined-up approach with councils, building control, and all of the bodies and agencies that need to be included.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Boylan: I support the motion and the amendment. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Dallat: I congratulate Michelle for proposing the motion. I listened very carefully to her introduction, and it is quite clear that she has researched this matter thoroughly. I look forward to the Minister's response. He has been on tour in Portrush and Portstewart sniffing out derelict sites like a sniffer dog, so I am sure he knows something about them.

Michelle, being a townie, as I understand, has referred to this as an urban problem, but it is a rural one as well. I hope that can be encompassed. I am not picking holes in the motion, but it makes reference to cleared sites: there are towns where the developer will come in and simply demolish a building on site. I know one town that is more like the Sahara desert; the only thing missing is camels. The people there pray for rain every day because of the serious health problems that arise. I am quite serious about that. That can go on for years because the property may be in some kind of liquidation, like the other properties that have been referred to.

These sites are all over the North; in urban areas, rural areas, hamlets and villages, and people's lives no matter where, whether a little boy in Athlone or anywhere else, are all precious. Some agency has to be responsible for this. Either that or the legislation is hopelessly out of date. I suspect it is the legislation that is the problem, although my colleague Patsy McGlone pointed out to me that, if this simply becomes a council problem, we still have to somehow encourage them to carry it out. We spoke with councillors at the NI Local Government Association conference last week who are cheesed off with the additional responsibilities that are given to them. I know that we still have a few councillors in this Assembly — in the short term, anyway.

Let us see where it goes from here and who picks up the bill. Is the legislation adequate to deal with the situation? Perhaps we cannot solve the problem. I think the motion points us in the right direction. Some of the properties are owned by the wonderful organisation called the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA), which was born in the Republic but owns lots of properties in the North. Who pays in such a case? The banks are not all broke; some of them have sites as well. Maybe it is not just a question of passing responsibility entirely to the councils, but of looking for those who now have ownership of the sites and seeing what obligation they are under to clear those sites up.

There is another problem. Sometimes these sites are between existing buildings, and I have experienced in Portrush falling masonry coming from the buildings on either side. Thankfully, no one has died from that to date, but that is a serious issue when there are high winds and so on. Again, it is something that we need to address.

I have every confidence. The issue is a very serious one and it is widespread. It is all over the place, and, until now, the councils have been very slow to react. Having spoken to building control officials in the Assembly earlier today, I believe that the legislation goes back to the 1800s. That is quite a while ago, and it certainly needs updating. I am very pleased that Michelle has identified that as an issue.

I am pleased that, depressing as this issue is, we can all unite on it and support the Minister, who has been very proactive. We must ensure that we bring some kind of relief to people in different areas whose communities have been blighted by this phenomenon. There is not just the danger that has been highlighted; the huge tourist potential of some towns and villages has been affected. Although it may not be as serious as children losing their lives, there is an economic element as well.

There are many reasons why we should support the motion and the amendment proposed by the Ulster Unionists.

6.00 pm

Ms Lo: I support the motion and the amendment. I take this opportunity to congratulate Alliance councillor Laura McNamee, who brought forward a motion in Belfast City Council calling on the Department to review the existing legislation on dangerous structures and the granting of discretionary powers to local councils in addressing dilapidated and ruinous structures, particularly abandoned building sites. I thank the proposers of the motion for bringing it to the Assembly, and I also thank Belfast City Council officials for their briefings on the seriousness of the problem.

Undeveloped and abandoned sites are not only an eyesore to the local amenity of an area but they present substantial health and safety concerns, including fly-tipping, contamination, antisocial behaviour and the potential for local children to access or use dangerous, abandoned or demolished sites as playgrounds.

At this point, I extend my sincere sympathy to the family of the toddler who died on an unfinished building site in Athlone last week. Sadly, that highlights the serious problem that we face in ghost estates, where development has been stopped or sites abandoned. The same is true of sites where demolition debris has not been cleared. In cases of dilapidated or blighted buildings, article 66 of the 1978 Pollution Control Order can apply. However, that stipulates that councils can serve orders where buildings are "seriously detrimental" to the amenity of the area. That definition is vague and requires clarification, as it has never been tested in court. Furthermore, councils are unable to serve notices on owners unknown in such cases and, therefore, cannot carry out work.

With regard to abandoned building sites, legislation such as the Belfast Improvement Act, the Town and Country Planning Act and the Public Health Act were not geared to deal with such cases. Councils also encounter problems where demolition is the elected next step. Planning permission is required before demolition can take place, and in serious situations where structures or buildings are on the brink of collapse or pose a serious danger to the public, councils need to be provided with a fast-track option, or, in extreme cases, a planning permission exemption.

Ownership is a final problem that councils encounter. Where ownership of dangerous structures cannot be established, councils can place notice on owner unknown. Although the ability to act where an owner cannot be established is welcomed, we need to look at how to enable councils to recover the money that is used to secure such sites. Additionally, as mentioned, article 66 of the Pollution Control Order does not even allow for notice to be served on owner unknown in cases of dilapidated buildings. The Minister

needs to bring forward proposals that widen the scope of responsibility to allow easier determination of ownership and extend responsibility to banks and administrators.

The problems that stem from those situations are wide ranging. At the Brooke Hall development in my constituency, local residents now feel that they are permanently living on the edge of a building site due to an unsecure section that contains building materials and machinery. In such cases, there needs to be co-operation with the Department for Regional Development, as residents such as those in Brooke Hall are left in limbo without roads or pavements.

I welcome and support the motion and the amendment, and I call on the Minister to ensure that his officials meet with councils so that they can fully comprehend the difficulties that they face and the powers that they require to take the lead in a multi-agency approach to securing dangerous structures.

I apologise that I cannot stay, but I have to go to a PACT meeting in south Belfast.

Mr G Robinson: Every constituency has areas, in town centres especially, that are blighted by the sight of vacant plots or dilapidated buildings. Unfortunately, my own town, Limavady, comes into that category and two other towns in my East Londonderry constituency spring to mind, namely Portrush and Portstewart. To my mind, they are in a small way blighted by some undeveloped sites, and with a major golf tournament and other major tourist events due to take place this year, they need to be tidied up.

At a time when most towns and cities are trying to attract investment and jobs, this does not help an investor's overall impression of an area. Those areas may sometimes also be used as centres of antisocial behaviour and may even be fire risks. As the motion states, there is currently no responsibility on local councils or the Health and Safety Executive to make such sites secure until redevelopment can take place. Legislation is needed to help deal with the problem, and that is what the motion is all about.

There must also be thought given to those people unfortunate enough to live in the vicinity of those sites, which can be a blight on their everyday lives. Not only do they have to suffer antisocial behaviour, they find that there is an increased risk of health and safety problems. If they own property, a severe impact on its value can be made by unsightly adjoining derelict buildings. Surely, as an Assembly, we must take positive action to ensure that the situation is rectified, not just for the sake of the people who are affected but because of the impact on the economy and the effect it will have on the future.

The motion seeks nothing revolutionary, just clarity as to who is responsible and what powers there are to address the problem in tandem with local councils. Therefore, I urge all Members to support my colleague Michelle's motion. I take pleasure in supporting it.

Mr Storey: I support the motion and the amendment. I declare an interest, first, as a member of Ballymoney Borough Council but also as a member of the Ballymoney Regeneration Company.

Mr Dallat: Ooh.

Mr Storey: I heard some Members say "Ooh" there. I have no shame just because former Councillor Dallat had to give up his seat on the council. I have no intention, in the short term, of doing so. I have no issue about being on Ballymoney Borough Council. I am very proud of the fact that I was first elected to that council, and I have declared my interest in the Ballymoney Regeneration Company.

I commend my colleague for bringing the motion to the House and to public attention. The sad reality is that it does not require a motion to bring it to public attention. When we go through our towns we see, unfortunately, and as has been pointed out by Members who spoke previously, the problem that we have with these sites.

In moving the motion, the Member referred to developers acting responsibly. Sometimes, I think that politicians and the public are very quick to lay the blame solely at the door of developers. Although developers have a huge responsibility, we must also remember that if it were not for some developers, we would not have any development in some of our towns. We need to ensure that we strike a balance between the responsibility of those who build in a particular location and the responsibilities of local councils, the Department of the Environment, the Planning Service, the Department for Social Development and other government agencies. We must work together to deal with this problem.

I note that Mr Dallat said that he would have concerns about referring this issue entirely to councils. For once in a long time, I think he is right. Councils are very concerned about the comments of his colleague the Minister of the Environment. They are worried that he is dumping a number of issues on local councils and not giving them the adequate resources to carry out those responsibilities. An example of that is the transitional committees.

However, let me take you to one location in my constituency, just a few yards away from my constituency office in Linenhall Street in Ballymoney. I left school 31 years ago and can remember Christie's, which occupied a site on that street when I was at school. For those 31 years, that property, almost an acre in size, has lain derelict and has become an eyesore, a place of contention and an embarrassment, despite repeated attempts by the local council and local representatives to do various things with the two separate owners over a long period.

That is why I make the point that sometimes it is not all about just blaming the developer. I have had meetings with the two owners of that site on numerous occasions over the past number of years. There is now planning permission to build residential homes and retail facilities on the site. However, the owners are now telling me that because of the financial circumstances that they find themselves in, they are unable to proceed.

The recommendation was then made to knock the building down. The cost of knocking it down and clearing the site, given all the implications of that, is huge. My colleague who moved the motion made reference to some things that could be done in relation to demolition. We need to find a solution that is not all rooted in DOE or in the developers or in the councils; it needs to be a genuine attempt by us all to find a solution to addressing what is a blight in our towns.

I hope that the Minister will come forward not just with the recommendations for Portrush and Portstewart, although they will be very welcome; I hope that he will go beyond the bounds of those recommendations to include other areas of Northern Ireland, including Linenhall Street in Ballymoney.

Mrs Overend: It is a pleasure to speak to the motion. My colleague Danny Kinahan proposed the amendment. I apologise because I cannot stay to hear the Minister's response this evening, but I will certainly be reading the Hansard report with interest later tonight.

We have heard in the Chamber that this is an issue that is blighting every constituency. The situation has worsened with the onset of the downturn in the housing market. Local constituents brought to my attention the issue of derelict buildings and incomplete sites in my area again last week. Therefore, from their perspective, this debate is very timely. From speaking to them, I came to understand the failings of the system, and I am thankful to the DUP for tabling the motion and accepting the Ulster Unionist amendment. The rationale of the amendment is to broaden the motion and to call on the DOE to acknowledge that although there may be legislation in place, it is not working as it should be.

The problem of incomplete sites and derelict buildings, often left unsecured, plagues many towns and villages across Northern Ireland, including those in my constituency of Mid Ulster. One such dangerous building is the old Moneymore post office, which sits in the centre of Moneymore. That building is derelict and is an eyesore. It is such a striking building in the heart of the town. That listed building is a perfect example of the type of building that we are discussing today. Minor restorative action could have substantial benefits for the health and safety of the structure, the aesthetics of the village and the businesses in it.

Just over a week ago, on a Saturday night, the model village in Moneymore was badly damaged by vandals. Local residents believe the damage was caused by drunken youths who were hanging out in a nearby derelict building. If that building had been made secure, the damage might have been averted. Those two stories are just a small sample of the issues. Indeed, I heard calls today from that plantation village to another plantation village, Draperstown, where there are similar concerns.

"Our listed buildings are jewels from the past which need to be conserved for now and future generations."

Those are not my words; they are the words of the Minister of the Environment, Alex Attwood. Those are sentiments I certainly agree with. From the constituents I have talked to in Mid Ulster, I know that there is a strong feeling about developers who come in and buy property only to leave it empty. Often, such properties become nothing more than dangerous playgrounds. It is not only a matter of creating an eyesore; there are health and safety issues. I hope that the Environment Minister will take up and agree to address the issue. I urge him to do so.

6.15 pm

The powers that councils currently have do not prevent the serious dereliction of a building, such as the post office in Moneymore. Legislation for dealing with incomplete sites and derelict buildings is largely out of date. More importantly, it is not in line with modern health and safety

standards. The language used, particularly in the Pollution Control and Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 1978, is vague and, in the opinion of one council to which my party talked yesterday, far too waffly. It includes the phrase:

"seriously detrimental to the amenities of the neighbourhood"

Any legislation that uses that phrase leaves itself incredibly exposed to dispute. It is the Ulster Unionist Party's belief that the Department of the Environment needs to engage with local councils to find a solution. Poor legislation and vague wording result in responsibility being passed from pillar to post.

The motion and amendment are about enabling local councils to respond more efficiently to the blight of incomplete sites and buildings. The securing of dangerous or dilapidated sites and properties can avert the vandalism seen in Moneymore and prevent further risk to the public. I encourage Members to support the amendment.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Thanks very much to those who moved the motion and amendment.

It is a very topical issue. Indeed, I might defer to Mr Storey and acknowledge that he raised a salient point. There are many good, committed developers who have fallen on hard times and are trying their best under difficult circumstances to try to rectify situations and work with the rest of us. Yes, there are cowboys, but that is true in every walk of life.

The flavour of the debate is that it is principally an urban or large town issue, but that is not the case. Those of us who represent rural constituencies, including Mrs Overend, see that blight in our smaller villages and smaller rural, dispersed communities. We saw the problem at its worst with the death of young Liam Keogh in Athlone. Ultimately, that is what happens when blighted sites are irresponsibly left uncared for and unsecured, and it means that we face difficulties, responsibilities and problems. The parents of that poor wee child face sheer pain.

We all know the issues that we face in our constituencies. We see the sites with no street lighting and poor footpaths and streets. Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, you know about Clonabay in Coalisland where the developer left an absolutely pathetic storm sewerage system. That raises a number of issues. People are living in houses in which they invested a lot of money, and they look out over sheer, utter blight. Nothing is attended to, dilapidation is all around them, and the situation is being exacerbated. However, that, in turn, raises a number of issues. For example, are the amounts of money and extent of the bonds put down, whether with Roads Service or another agency, adequate to cover the reinstatement of that estate and to make sure that the footpaths are brought up to a standard adequate for adoption? There is also a lengthy process to realise some or all the money required to bring the estate up to standard. That really has to be looked at.

It also leads to serious questions about the quality of legal advice given to many buyers. People were advised to sign off on deals to buy properties in circumstances in which the advice should have been to do the opposite. Their legal advisers should have told them to watch out and not to sign because the estate had not been properly looked after

or brought up to the condition required for a dwelling. That needs to be looked at as well.

As regards the review of the legislation, we look through briefing documents here, and, apparently, there is legislation until the cows come home, ranging across Departments from DRD to DSD to DOE. Members have reflected on that. As we heard earlier, it is all about harmonising legislation and making it much more contemporary. However, there is a concern that it will be dumped onto councils without their having the finance to do anything about it. If a council assumes responsibility for reinstatement and making a site safe, does that lead to an ongoing responsibility? If it does, can the developer just walk?

Strong checks need to be made on the financial circumstances of the owner of the site and the other companies that that person might own or have a share in, not only in this jurisdiction but in other jurisdictions. We live in an age when developers shift in and out of jurisdictions and often work the system. The last thing that we want is for the system to be worked in that way and for all the cost to be dumped on ratepayers.

Another issue that we need to look at is the question of liability for the maintenance and upkeep costs —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr McGlone: — and assumption of the duty of care. We do not want to absolve owners of responsibility and hand it over to councils when owners should take responsibility. I support entirely the motion and the amendment.

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I thank Michelle McIlveen, Peter Weir — who has not spoken yet — Danny Kinahan and Sandra Overend.

Mr Weir: The thanks might be premature.

Mr Attwood: I will withdraw it then. *[Laughter.]*

I join other Members in expressing sympathy following the tragic death in Athlone. If it is appropriate, Mr Deputy Speaker, given that it has been referred to by a number of Members, I will write to the chair of Athlone Town Council and confirm not only that the death was noted with sympathy but that it concentrated everybody's minds because, but for the grace of God, it will happen here. Given those circumstances, it would be appropriate to write.

I will start, perhaps unusually, by explaining what I will do further to the debate rather than just responding to the various comments. The issue has, to some degree, been on my radar, and, I hope, on that of other Ministers, in recent months. For that reason, I convened what I called the blight summit in Portstewart in October 2011 to make assessments about what DOE might do and what might be done generally. Subject to what Mr Weir may yet say, I have to record my gratitude to Members and say that the debate has further concentrated my mind on what I need to do and on what government needs to do.

In responding to the debate, this is what I propose to do. First, whether Mrs Overend reads the Hansard report on her way to bed or not, we will interrogate it to identify all and each of the various initiatives that were proposed. The issue stretches beyond the competence of my office. It touches on Land Registry and registration matters, which cuts across

DFP; health and safety, which, as Members indicated, cuts across DETI; roads and lighting, which cuts across DRD; and so on and so forth. It is such a cross-cutting issue that the Hansard report needs to be interrogated to identify each and all of the initiatives that were proposed to see where they lie and what should be done in respect of all of them. In doing so, I will give my officials more homework by asking them to scope out what DOE's response should be and how we will engage Ministers and senior officials in other Departments to address the issue.

As we all know, whether it is in Portrush, Portstewart, Newtownards, Limavady or many other towns and cities or on the Lisburn Road in Belfast, the issue is becoming acute and will be with us for five or 10 years or more. The collective wisdom of all of government, therefore, needs to be applied to address those matters. Subject to the agreement of other Ministers, I will suggest that there be an interdepartmental group of senior officials to look at all the proposals and to address what is required in policy and legislation.

As suggested, I will gather councils together to learn from, in particular, Belfast City Council because, as a number of Members rightly pointed out, it has the best collated advice on such matters. Although I asked officials to send that information to all councils previously, it probably would be useful to gather them all together and to get a lead council such as Belfast City Council, whose practice in the area is perhaps more advanced, to share best practice and, therefore, enable others to deploy it. When all the issues raised by Members have been gathered together, I will send a report to the Environment Committee. Other Ministers may want to send reports to their relevant Committees to identify what has been done and what more needs to be done to take forward all the issues raised. Given the quality of the debate, I owe it to the Chamber to do that and to encourage other Ministers to do so. The debate has been far-reaching and has moved beyond the remit of DOE, and Members tried to identify solutions to problems that are beginning to appear in various parts of Northern Ireland. It is, therefore, only appropriate that the scale of my response and that of government should be in the terms that I outlined.

When I was the Minister for Social Development, I used to argue that investing in town centres and public realms helps to stabilise and grow local trade. I used to give the example of Main Street in Newcastle, County Down, where, because of public realm intervention, footfall had increased by 300%. Conversely, if our town centres decline further through dereliction, footfall is unlikely to be encouraged. In fact, footfall is likely to decrease and trading conditions in those areas will be depressed. Just as government can intervene positively to grow and stabilise local trading conditions, so, too, can central government, local government and others by addressing decay, dereliction and dilapidation to ensure that the appearance of town centres, villages and cities is improved. A bad built environment only encourages bad trading conditions, which only depress the economy and market further. That is how I come at this. On the one hand, there needs to be positive interventions to stabilise and grow trade. On the other hand, there needs to be interventions to mitigate risk where it arises.

When I convened the blight summit last autumn, I did not anticipate the announcement about the Irish Open this summer. The reason why we convened the blight summit

was in anticipation of such events coming down the road. What could we do in areas such as Portrush and Portstewart to address the situation? The scope and scale of what we should do is clearly greater than what we have done so far. Nonetheless, there have been some interventions that have begun to tell the tale of how government can intervene to address such matters. For example, following the blight summit and the two heritage crime summits last summer and autumn, the Department began to deploy urgent works notices in respect of listed buildings more rigorously. Over the past 30 years — this sounds remarkable — the government in the North have deployed only two urgent works notices in respect of listed buildings. However, I am sure that every Member in the Chamber could name listed buildings that are decaying and that the Government have never intervened to protect. Mrs Overend referred to properties in Moneymore in that regard.

Arising from that scary figure, I instructed the Department to begin to identify properties for which urgent work notices could be served. We have done that and have begun to serve notices. In the past two or three months, five such opportunities have arisen. As a consequence, urgent work notices have been served on landowners in Derry, Dungannon and Dundrum. In Belfast, works were done by developers because of the threat that notices would be served.

6.30 pm

I understand the point that Mervyn Storey and John Dallat made in respect of developers. They have overreached. They have done good business in the past. At present, some of them are in a bit of a conundrum. However, as I indicated earlier during Question Time, I cannot tolerate that certain developers in the North, who are on Planning Service's back to get planning permission or retrospective planning permission for buildings that are finished or almost finished, are, at the same time as actively developing and pushing Planning Service for approvals, allowing adjacent sites — and I mean adjacent sites — to go to rack and ruin. That is not responsible development.

If developers want government to stretch themselves, including in the context of the run down to the Irish Open, in order to enable development to happen, even if that is through retrospective approval, responsibility falls to developers to respond in a similar manner to the sites that they own, whether they be at Portrush or Portstewart, where the situation is acute, or in other parts of the North. Developers must face up to their responsibilities and not simply offload onto government.

I want to talk about the situation in Portrush and Portstewart in particular, where, over the next short while — probably, the next number of days — I will, working with the local council, take measures to ensure that developers, whoever they might be, begin to fulfil their responsibilities. However, that will not be enough because of the quality and state of Portrush and Portstewart with regard to dereliction and decay. That area is not the only example: I appreciate the situation in Newtownards. Given the context in that area and the situation that is faced in the run down to the Irish Open, government must demonstrate that they will improve the physical appearance of the area in order to demonstrate not only that the north coast has a great golf course and heritage, but that we will try to build the built environment there, particularly in Portrush and Portstewart.

Therefore, in the next hours or days, subject to DFP approval, I hope to release significant sums of money so that the local council can, in quick time, deploy measures to secure sites that are in decay or dereliction and to improve the appearance of sites; both those that have never been developed and those that have been developed then abandoned before completion. I hope that that will show the way. I would like to think that, in the fullness of time, either my Department or others would deploy those mechanisms in other parts of the North, not least in the city of Derry in advance of the run down to the year of culture. On Friday, I spent some time up there, and I met a number of people to discuss projects on the built heritage in and around the walls in which government may have a role to get more involved.

I will respond briefly to some points that were made. I noted that John Dallat referred to me as a sniffer dog. Previously, I have been referred to as a terrier, but never as a poodle. I would like to think of myself as a bit of a guard dog when it comes to good government. When I sniffed around Portstewart, there was a foul smell. As I said, certain developers must not leave that smell to endure any longer. As I outlined, we will take that matter forward.

I agree with people that the issue of the legal concepts in the various legislation of what is seriously detrimental to amenity is one that we need to get legal advice on, and we may need to broaden the interpretation, if that is consistent with best advice. However, as Mr McGlone pointed out, ultimately it will fall to councils to take forward some of those responsibilities.

Without getting into the issue of what central government might or might not do, it seems that it falls to local councillors to acknowledge that there are critical situations in various parts of Northern Ireland and that those critical situations in respect of derelict sites or dilapidation must become a greater priority for councils. It is not simply a matter of having better laws, although there needs to be, and it is not simply a matter of reinterpretation of the existing law, although there may be an argument for so doing. It is the responsibility of local councils to say that, given the context that we find ourselves in, and given the levels of decay and dereliction that they might endure over the next five or 10 years, they are going to give greater priority to taking forward the existing legislation that falls to them in order to ensure that the decay and dereliction is mitigated. I will face up to my responsibilities, and I will encourage other Ministers to do likewise. It seems to me that council leadership has the same responsibility.

Mr Beggs: This has been a very worthwhile debate. I thank the Member and her colleagues for tabling the motion. There has been a general consensus on the need for significant improvement in this area. I understand that everyone has accepted the amendment tabled by Danny Kinahan and Sandra Overend, which attempts to widen the motion to include derelict buildings and incomplete sites, which are a significant part of the problem in our communities.

Danny Kinahan started by giving us a tour of his constituency from Crumlin to Ballyclare; John Dallat moved on to Portrush and Portstewart; George Robinson referred to Limavady; and Mervyn Storey and Sandra Overend referred to Ballymoney. I have to say that there are problems in my constituency, and I can think of significant difficulties in Carrickfergus. To pick up on the Minister's comment about

some of the listed buildings; there is a site directly opposite the historic Carrickfergus Castle, Kelly's coal office, which is a Grade B1 listed building that has been sitting in ruins for several years and is at risk of further dilapidation. It is not something that would appeal to the tourists that we are trying to bring into this country. Therefore, I support the Minister in being proactive in that area.

I also highlight Prospect House in Carrickfergus, which is a Grade A listed late Georgian house. Development was allowed to be completed right around it, and yet the money raised from that was not used to upgrade that property. There is something wrong with a planning system that allowed that to happen. Again, that property has, on occasions, become a playground and a dangerous area for our young people to congregate. The unsightliness of the building is also a nuisance and an irritant to those who have bought houses in the area. Ballyloran House in the Larne area is a Grade 1 listed building that is sitting derelict and open to possible antisocial activity.

A number of Members talked about the dated legislation. I thank the Assembly's Research and Information Service for providing a brief, which is fascinating when you read through it in detail. A lot of Members referred to the Pollution Control and Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 1978. However, when you read through a lot of the other legislation that is relevant, you come to the Public Health (Ireland) Act 1872 and the Public Health Acts Amendment Act 1980. There is some very dated legislation. Other legislation dates from the 1950s and 1960s. It is clear that we are operating under some very dated legislation. We have heard about good practice in Belfast, which has additional legislation — the Belfast Corporation Act 1911. I am sure that improvements could also happen there.

Local government has experience of this problem, and it is clear that there is a need to liaise closely and work together to come up with a workable solution. Local government has professionals with knowledge in the area. Its building control division will have dealt with issues such as dangerous buildings and dereliction, and its environmental health division will have professionals who can give appropriate guidance. Local government has a lot of knowledge and we ought to work with it to come up with a good solution.

Other Members mentioned that, in some instances, there have been problems in identifying the ownership of buildings. When property changes hands — whether through receivership, transfer of ownership or fire sales — that can be a problem. There is a need to require owners to take urgent action; they cannot simply pass the trouble on and avoid taking that action. We need to get wiser to deal with the issue.

Members also mentioned the issues of ghost estates, unfinished properties and dangerous playgrounds. I have frequently come across the issue of playgrounds that are left unfinished or for which the original designs have not been delivered, and I think that we ought to look at whether the delivery of such work should be included in bonds. I am unsure whether they are already included, but if playgrounds are intended to be part of area plans, they should be delivered and not be allowed to go amiss. We can eventually get roads built using the bond system, so surely there ought to be a means of protecting listed buildings or finishing playgrounds.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Beggs: I ask Members to support the motion and the amendment.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Peter Weir to make a winding-up speech on the amendment; sorry, on the motion.

Mr Weir: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. There did seem to be a little bit of confusion towards the end of the debate.

I am reminded that, last week in the House of Commons, the Conservative MP Jacob Rees-Mogg talked about floccinaucinihilipilification, which is the art or process of estimating something as worthless or irrelevant. Today, I think that we have had a debate that is very much the antithesis of that term. We have had a very sensible debate. A range of views have been expressed across the Chamber and, as the Minister indicated, there was plenty of food to go through the mincer of the Department with the various ideas that were put forward. John Dallat put it succinctly when he said that although the issue is depressing, it is one that we can at least all unite around.

As we heard from across the Chamber, the issue undoubtedly affects all the constituencies in Northern Ireland. It cuts through not simply from east to west but across the board. As was pointed out by Mr Dallat and Mr McGlone, although a number of Members referred to it in an urban context, it is an urban, a suburban and a rural issue.

When Mr Beggs was summing up and quoting the list of examples from east Antrim, I thought of the saying that all politics is local. Fortunately, Mr Beggs widened it beyond Carrickfergus.

The issue before us is deeply frustrating for many constituents. As a number of Members mentioned, unsecured properties have knock-on effects on the locations that they are beside and can become eyesores or detrimental to the overall area. As the Minister highlighted, dereliction often leads to decline, and we need to bear that in mind.

Some Members felt that the motion was an unfair attack on developers, but that was not the intention behind it. As was mentioned, there are many responsible developers out there. I know of cases in my constituency in which problems arose and developers took swift action to clear up the situation. Developers are not the target of the motion.

Concerns were also raised that the motion was an attempt to dump on councils and ratepayers. That was not its intention, and I am sure that that will not be the case with whatever proposals eventually come forward. It is about a sense of empowerment rather than a sense of burden and ensuring that, for example, when statutory notices are served, they cannot simply be ignored by developers. It is very much in line with the idea of polluters paying and with the words of the proposer of the motion, Miss McIlveen:

"costs would lie with the party at fault".

That has pervaded a number of pieces of legislation, and it is important that we follow through on that.

6.45 pm

The proposer of the motion highlighted a number of issues, but particularly some of the dangers. The most obvious one is health and safety, and I join with others in passing on my

sympathies to the family of the toddler who died in Athlone. In the words of the Minister, it is by the grace of God that such a thing has not happened in Northern Ireland. We need to take proper action to make sure that it does not happen.

Similarly, as Miss McIlveen highlighted, you can get illegal dumping grounds that can very easily become eyesores. At best, they can offer a degree of encouragement to antisocial behaviour — for example, drink and drugs. Therefore, it is important that we develop policies that tackle all those problems.

Miss McIlveen, Mrs Lo and others mentioned the specific position of Belfast. Perhaps because of a quirk of history, there has been specific legislation that has given opportunities to Belfast. It is undoubtedly the case that, as the Minister highlighted, whenever there is a convening of all those involved in local government on the issue, Belfast has, perhaps, had a slightly different experience and has been able to apply certain solutions. It is important that better liaison with councils does apply. Legislation and finding sensible solutions are at the root of this. Consequently, a thoughtful analysis of the process will bear dividends.

The purpose of the motion — and the amendment — is to try to close that gap. There have been opportunities in other sets of circumstances for interventions, but councils and local communities have found themselves powerless. That is why we welcome the amendment. The proposer of the amendment highlighted the wider issue of ownership of properties, although that goes beyond the issue at hand. He mentioned a situation in which action was being taken but seven owners could not be traced. The problem is that if we do not tackle this, as was said, people will live with the consequences.

We have to look at whether a bond solution can be part of the answer. It is also an issue of giving councils the opportunity to do that investigation. It is not a question of shifting a particular responsibility on them, but of giving them that power.

The legislation around this has been there for quite a long time. Even Mr Dallat conceded that the 1800s was quite a while ago, predating his involvement in Coleraine Borough Council. Therefore, there has been some degree of examination of or action on the issue. As a number of Members said, it is about pulling together what is there and ensuring that we have an effective structure and effective legislation.

Mrs Lo highlighted issues in Belfast, but also the particular issues of contamination and fly-tipping. She expressed a concern that although we have legislation, some of the definitions are somewhat vague. George Robinson highlighted the wider context and described the impact on tourism on the north coast and on the wider economy. Apart from anything else, it is an issue of overall perception. Mervyn Storey, in a speech occasionally supportive to the motion — to be fair, we had to dig down — called for a balanced approach, which we all would endorse. It is not a question simply of accusing developers, but about finding solutions that everyone can work with. Sandra Overend gave a very specific example of the impact of one particular situation on the town of Moneymore as a whole. She said that the need for a degree of early intervention is important.

Cathal Boylan said that this was one of a series of new challenges. It is one that people are up for, provided it is done in the right way. Patsy McGlone, wearing a 10-gallon Stetson hat, said that there are cowboys in every profession. I assume that he was not referring to himself in that regard. He again talked about the need to harmonise legislation and getting that right. The Minister indicated that there would have to be a thoughtful strategy that, we would all accept, involves various Departments. Working together, particularly with councils, is important.

This cannot be simply offloaded on to government; those who are responsible for it have to bear that responsibility. As he indicated, we need to see interventions where we can in quick time. In conclusion, Roy Beggs highlighted the particular problems in East Antrim and the need to get the legislation correct.

We have had a wide-ranging debate, and there is plenty that the Department can take away from it. I appreciate the Minister's commitment to do that. Given that it affects all of us in different parts of Northern Ireland, we can unite behind it, so I urge the House to back the motion and the amendment standing in the names of Mr Kinahan and others.

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

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes that there are a number of sites in urban areas where buildings or other structures have been demolished or removed pending future development and that neither local councils nor the Health and Safety Executive has the power to require that they are made secure; and calls on the Minister of the Environment to bring forward proposals to empower local councils to require that incomplete sites and derelict buildings be made secure.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I ask the House to take its ease for a couple of minutes.

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

Motion made:

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

Adjournment

Children and Young People with Cancer: East Belfast

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes to speak, and the Minister will have 10 minutes to respond. All other Members who are called to speak will have approximately six minutes.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Minister for coming. I know that he has a busy schedule, and I am glad that he is willing to give this matter his attention. I welcome the opportunity to speak about and raise the issue.

Cancer is a terrible disease that affects so many. All of us know someone who is affected. It is a cruel illness that is often so much worse when it hits a child or young person. Every week in Northern Ireland, two children and young people are given such devastating news. No area of that child or their family's life will be unaffected, from the severe physiological effects of the disease and treatment regime to the emotional, financial and social impacts that accompany it.

Cancer treatment has improved over the past number of years, and the Executive's 'Service Framework for Cancer Prevention, Treatment and Care' has given it more focus. In particular, the framework includes specific standards for children's and young people's cancer. Standard 31 states:

"All children and young people (aged 0-24...) with cancer should be managed by a multidisciplinary team whose composition reflects the needs of the child or young person at each point in their care journey."

Standard 32 states:

"All adolescents and young people (aged 14-24...) with cancer should receive holistic assessment and care that is age appropriate and delivered by team members who are adequately trained in the care of this specific group of patients."

Unfortunately, baseline data for standards 31 and 32 have yet to be collected, although I understand that that will be completed by December.

I have heard some heartbreaking stories from families in East Belfast who have real emotional, practical and financial needs. The Minister needs to put options in place to actively support children and young people with cancer and their families in the hospital, at home and in the community. The implementation of standards 31 and 32 has the potential to improve the provision of treatment and care for young patients, and I am, therefore, concerned that the implementation plan for the framework has yet to be published.

To give an example of why this support is so vital, let me tell you about Jacob, who lives less than a mile from here. Jacob

was diagnosed with cancer on 17 September 2009. He was three and had just started his preschool year in Kings Road Nursery School. As a result of his diagnosis, he was given a treatment plan that would span more than three years, and, to begin with, he had to spend many weeks in hospital in isolation. Immediately, the impact on his whole family was immense. He had an older sister, a younger sister and a younger brother, all of whom had needs of their own. His parents did their best to manage juggling school drop-offs, childcare needs, household chores, preparing meals and going to work among the numerous nights spent sleeping on a chair at Jacob's bedside in hospital and talking him through his treatment, comforting him when he was in pain, and so on and so on. When he was having the treatment in hospital, the nurses brought the medicines, and the parents were able to administer it. However, when they were sent home with a large pharmacy bag and, all of a sudden, the responsibility lay with them, as parents, it was very daunting. I witnessed the various charts on the wall in the kitchen that set out which medication had to be given on specific days and at specific times. You almost had to be a qualified nurse to work it out. Team that with another child who needs some Calpol, and it very soon becomes very stressful.

At this point, Jacob, having just entered the education system, pretty much dropped out of it. There were play specialists in the ward, and his parents spent time reading with him to ensure that he was not missing out on any learning. However, the lack of social skills, which are learnt during preschool, and his inability to deal with the routine were only really evident the following year when he went into primary 1. Settling into school can be difficult enough, but he just could not accept the routine, and his mum described that first term as a nightmare.

When he was at home, his parents had to carefully manage who could come in and out of the house to try to contain the risk of infection. However, that brought other problems, not just for Jacob but for his three siblings, who were unable to have friends round to play. Other siblings can often blame the child for being sick and preventing them from being able to participate in activities such as family swim time. That is another difficult situation for parents to manage, and they often have to tiptoe around conversations.

Jacob is now into his third year of treatment and his family have come so far, but things are still very difficult. His mum has had to resign from her job as she needs to be available for the regular hospital appointments, and she always has a bag packed just in case he needs to be kept in. He is on steroids about five days a month, and during that time, he struggles with concentration, has different eating habits and will often have to be kept home from school. There is also the added risk of illness through many of the childhood diseases that are carried around our schools. That is also when he needs to be kept home. We need to ensure that young people like that maintain strong links with their schools while they are on treatment.

Another family in East Belfast that I have spent time with were devastated when their son was diagnosed with cancer while he was studying at university. His treatment was very severe and included the use of stem cell technology, which meant that he was in isolation for long periods. As he had left school and gone straight to university, he had never been in need of benefits before, and neither he nor his parents were able to negotiate the benefit system. It

was difficult, and there were added financial pressures to deal with, such as the lease on his flat in Scotland, which was with a private landlord and still had to be paid. All of a sudden, he again became a dependant of his mum and dad. It is, therefore, so important that financial support to young people and parents is put in place, especially as welfare reform proceeds. Emotionally, he had to deal with the fact that his friends were progressing through university when he was missing out on so much that he had worked so hard for at school. He was worried about his prospects, isolated from his peers and felt downright lousy during the treatment.

Young people like that are treated alongside adults and, therefore, they are often left out when it comes to receiving age-specific support, social work and wider psychosocial support, which is so crucial for young cancer patients and their subsequent recovery. The service framework for cancer prevention, treatment and care recognises the need for a distinct service for teenagers and young adults, but that piece of work, which is being led by the Northern Ireland Cancer Network (NICaN), may stall due to the uncertainty around funding arrangements of NICaN. I hope that the Minister will be able to provide some assurances on that.

With budgets being cut overall, I appreciate that there is massive stress on the health budget. However, as I have often said in other debates, early intervention is so important. Offering support to those going through treatment can ease the demand on services in later years. Investment is required to improve the timely and equitable access for all children and young people with cancer and their families to effective and efficient services, to continuously improve outcomes. The implementation of the standards in the framework will help to improve the care and treatment of children and young people with cancer, not just in East Belfast but across all of Northern Ireland.

I have outlined my concerns, and I hope that the Minister will agree on the importance of this issue and bring proposals to move forward with the implementation of the framework to ensure that the standards are achieved. I thank him once again for coming here this evening.

Mr Douglas: I am pleased to participate in this Adjournment debate, and I thank Judith Cochrane for securing it. At the outset, I want to state clearly that although this debate is about support for children and young people with cancer in East Belfast, I hope that we will look at the issues from a Northern Ireland perspective. I think Judith did that.

As we all know, cancer knows no boundaries, whether of age, gender, socio-economic status or geographical location.

7.00 pm

I would like to begin by paying tribute to the cancer charities in Northern Ireland that have been lobbying to increase awareness of cancer in general and to secure early implementation of the cancer services framework. Those charities, which carry out such an important job, often on a 24-hour basis, deserve the encouragement and support of us all. I will quote from the website of the CLIC Sargent charity on what that type of charity means to children and parents. This is an extract from a mother whose son was in hospital recovering from an acute form of leukaemia:

"When we first arrived at the hospital everything was so overwhelming. Then this face appeared in the doorway, it

was Laurena our CLIC Sargent Social Worker. She was like an angel and we would have been lost without her."

Many of us in the Chamber tonight — and there are not too many — will have our own stories of angels in the health service and stories of our own Laurenas.

I, like many others in the Chamber, am certainly not an expert on the many aspects of cancer, but this type of debate helps all of us to be more informed about the issues and to explore ways of making the services even better for children and young people. Again, I pay tribute to Judith for bringing this Adjournment debate forward.

When carrying out some research for the debate I was very encouraged by the wide range of services that are available across Northern Ireland, including specialist teenagers' and young adults' cancer posts. The £60 million cancer centre on the Belfast City Hospital site deals specifically with teenagers and young adults, as does the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children, which provides such a valuable service of outreach into the community. Those are but two excellent examples in Belfast of quality cancer care in action. Currently, children of 13 years of age and above whose treatment is managed by Belfast City Hospital are often supported by district nursing services locally and, if necessary, the CCN team. Children below the age of 13 are catered for in the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children.

I spoke to one of my colleagues today, who told me that her young nephew, who is only seven, was diagnosed with a brain tumour. He recently went through a range of treatments and care. She said:

"I have nothing but praise for the comprehensive cancer services that my nephew received."

I think that we do have an excellent service in Northern Ireland. Do we have opportunities for improvement? Of course we do. When we talk about the support offered to our young people who are suffering from cancer, it is also important to highlight the excellent work carried out by the Northern Ireland Children's Hospice, which provides respite for children and young people in-house or within the family home.

I was speaking today to the famous east Belfast lottery winner Peter Lavery, who is involved in the Northern Ireland's Children to Lapland Trust. That trust, in its own unique way, provides a wonderful service by bringing dozens of terminally ill children to Lapland every year for the holiday of a lifetime. However, while I appreciate all of the excellent treatment and care that is available for children and young people with cancer, there is no doubt that, for young people, the health service can be confusing and intimidating. In that regard, we certainly have no room for complacency.

I will finish by saying that, for us as an Assembly and for the Health Minister — it is great to see him here tonight — there is absolutely no room for complacency. Tonight is about raising the issues. The question for us all is: can we help any more?

Mr Copeland: I, too, thank Mrs Cochrane for bringing this issue before us this evening. I am now a good deal closer to 60 than I am comfortable with, and I have not lived a life that could be described as isolated, cosseted or insular. In that life, I have, on occasions, experienced very great good

and very great Christian charity, and I have also experienced what can only be described as the depths of evil. There is nothing, in my view, more evil than the effects that that awful range of diseases has on children and families.

I do not want to go into detail because most of you know it already, but my wife, some 22 years ago, at the age of not quite 30, was diagnosed with breast cancer and survived. Our son, at that stage, was, I think, five days old. During that time, we had to go to the very old, some would say old-fashioned — I think the word decrepit was used on occasion — Belvoir Park Hospital cancer centre. The building may have been old, but a spirit developed in that building among those who found themselves confronted with that disease that I do not think sits as easily at the new sanitised affair at the City Hospital.

Treatment entailed travelling every day for six months for radiotherapy and every two or three days for chemotherapy, only to find, on occasion, when you got there that you could not take the drugs because the white blood cell count was down. Throughout that time, our visits were cheered as we became friendly with a little kid from County Antrim. I will call him Jack; that is not his real name. He was accompanied every day by his two aunts. We thought that he looked so well that one of his aunts must have been receiving treatment, but it transpired that it was him.

To go back to something that Judith said earlier, I could not understand why, every time I saw him, he was eating a pound and a half of cooked ham. It was because he was on steroids. I am appreciative of accents, but there is nothing nicer than a kid with a County Antrim accent because every time he spoke, I smiled.

Sonia got through the radiotherapy, the chemotherapy and the mastectomy. She got through a silicone implant that did not work and had to be removed. She got through a TRAM flap operation, and we went from going every six months, to going every year, to going every two years, to going every five years. The first person who gave us hope was a clinical oncologist at Belvoir Park Hospital. I will not name him, but at one meeting towards the end, when Sonia was at three-year reviews, we asked, "What about wee Jack?" He just looked at us and said, "It killed him." Although I was in his company for only a very few hours over a short period, that affected me in a way that was brought to mind recently when I was blessed with the arrival of a grandchild, because you look at a child or a grandchild, and they are yours — they would not be there if it was not for you, and upon you falls the responsibility to protect them and keep them safe. Then, something that you cannot see, touch or explain comes and destroys a life, possibly several lives.

We were treated in the Northern Ireland health service at that time with compassion, and it was efficient, if that is the word that can be used. The social services, once you got to know the system, worked, but nothing can replace the feeling of sheer helplessness when confronted with something that you know will do whatever it is going to do, regardless of what you do.

I know that these responsibilities lie heavily on the Health Minister because he is responsible for everything and does not have the money to do what, in some cases, needs to be done. But the truth is, sir, whatever steps you can take to ameliorate the effects of this condition on children will have

the support of any right-thinking person in this Chamber and, I believe, the support of any right-thinking person in this society. I thank Judith again for bringing this issue forward.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I thank the Member for proposing the topic for this Adjournment debate. At the outset, I have to say that I have an interest in this matter because, although some of you may think that I am a devil, I am, in fact, married to an angel who has supported, worked with and cared for children suffering from cancer for over 20 years.

Therefore, I know quite well the trauma that those families and children came through. It is not only about the experience of suffering from cancer, the side effects of the treatment, and so on, but about the experience of one or both parents having to give up work, the costs associated with travelling to hospital regularly and the burdens that are put on other children and family members. It is immense and life-changing. You would never want it to be visited on your own home for a range of reasons, not least the fact that many young people lose their lives. That said, many recover and go on to live normal lives. One of the most satisfying things is to see a young person who had cancer grow up and be able to give birth. That is really good because many of those young people did not expect that they would have such an opportunity.

In my role as Minister, I have met children and young adults who have undergone the trauma and stress related to their cancer treatment. I can, therefore, empathise with the parents and the families, who want only the best for their children. I want to assure them today that, as Minister, I want the health and social care service to deliver the best treatment and care to this group.

Our cancer services are organised on a regional basis, and all the evidence tells us that regional specialist centres, with highly skilled professionals supported by multidisciplinary teams, delivering the highest-quality treatment and care available, will provide the best outcomes for patients, regardless of their age or where they live. Everyone here today knows someone affected by cancer. If you do not mind, I want to widen the debate to services provided to all children and young people across Northern Ireland.

The health service in Northern Ireland has made significant progress in the care and treatment of cancer in the past decade and has made huge improvements in outcomes for patients, as evidenced by the prestigious diamond jubilee prize for the work of the comprehensive cancer centre. I wish to extend my warm congratulations to the team at Queen's University Belfast for this magnificent achievement. However, we do not need to be complacent, and we still have more to do to make all our outcomes among the best in Europe.

The improvements that have been made to date have been brought about through an investment in cancer services and, crucially, by a major refocusing on how services are delivered. Cancer services have moved from a position in which fragments of cancer treatment were provided at all our hospitals, resulting in there not being a uniform standard of care, and outcomes ranging from poor in some hospitals to outstanding in others. Through reorganisation, we now have a network of dedicated cancer units, staffed by specialist multidisciplinary teams. Doctors and nurses provide the

highest standards of treatment and care, whereby the patient is the focus of their care and all services provided are evidence-based and reviewed.

All that, of course, costs money. In Northern Ireland, we spend around £22 million annually on a range of cancer medicines. As Minister, I am determined that this investment is effectively and efficiently used. I want the health and social care sector to support families of children with cancer, which is why my Department provides children and young adults, or their parents, with access to direct payments to assist them financially in their social care as they have to adjust to the impact of their children's treatments. As Minister of Health, my priority is to ensure that the health and social care treatment and care provision of children and young adults is of the highest quality available across the UK. However, it is also important for Members to recognise the fact that the needs of this young group are much wider than its specific health and social care needs, including their financial and educational needs.

I recognise the fact that there is more that we can do on raising awareness of the needs of this age group. The Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency are taking forward work to ensure that pathways and protocols for teenagers and young adults with cancer reflect high-quality care, consistent with National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidance on improving outcomes for children and young people with cancer.

It is intended that this work will be progressed in collaboration with health and social care (HSC) trusts and voluntary sector organisations. Experts have told me that the ideal for this group is to be cared for in their own homes or as close as possible to their homes, and that is why I have continued to invest in outreach nursing services specifically in that area.

7.15 pm

Services to support children and families with cancer are provided, for the most part, on a multi-agency and multidisciplinary basis. The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership has recently consulted on its draft 'Northern Ireland Children and Young People's Plan 2011-2014'. The plan aims to put in place integrated planning and commissioning arrangements across agencies and sectors to improve the well-being and realisation of the rights of all children in Northern Ireland. Although accepting the reality of the constraints we face in the current economic climate, I am determined that my Department, working with the HSC Board, will ensure that the HSC is delivering the most efficient service it can for all patients.

In addition, the HSC Board continues to direct investment into vital front line services such as support and care for children and young adults living with the effects of cancer. I recognise that, to a young person, the health service can be confusing and intimidating. That is why my Department, through its links with the children and young people's group within the Northern Ireland Cancer Network (NICaN), has commissioned work to identify the existing multiple points of entry and complex pathways to treatment, care and support currently experienced by teenagers and young adults.

NICaN has been instrumental in advancing cancer treatments here, and I wish to pay tribute to the dedicated staff in NICaN, other cancer units and the Belfast Cancer

Centre who have worked tirelessly to ensure that our patients are not disadvantaged in comparison with those in the rest of the UK.

Recently, we have seen further major changes in how we can deliver cancer treatment and care. In February last year, the cancer services framework was launched. There has been significant achievement against the standards in the service framework, although some require an extension to time frames in line with the current financial climate. We will continue to work towards full implementation of the framework.

NICaN has been a driving force in the delivery of services to cancer patients and is actively engaged with teenagers and young adults. Initial work has identified a number of specific issues relating to communication, staff training, patient information and access to support services. Although developments in this area are at an early stage, the outcomes of the work will help commissioners to shape services to better meet the specific needs of this group.

My Department, through its links with NICaN, has commissioned work to identify the existing, and often confusing, array of multiple points of entry and pathways experienced by teenagers and young adults when assessing their various sources of cancer treatment. Children and young adults' service provision can be complex, and their needs evolve differently over time, as they move from parents and guardians holding full parental responsibility towards being recognised as responsible people themselves. There is also the complexity of moving from a children's hospital to an adults' hospital when they are still quite young. Nonetheless, the treatment is different, and there is a challenge for the medics to deal with that.

Each person's care has to be assessed on an individual basis. It is not a simplistic matter, and one size does not fit all. Children and young people do not fit into predefined boxes easily. The health service is moving towards a multidisciplinary and multi-agency approach to the provision of care for children and young adults, involving them in how their treatment and care plans are to be designed and delivered.

We have made good progress, but we can, and need to, make further progress. Any solution for children and young adults will need to involve the statutory and independent sectors working closely together. That is why I welcome the involvement of independent sector organisations such as CLIC Sargent, Macmillan and others that work in this area, as we could not have made such progress without them.

In conclusion, I wish to assure the Assembly that access to the latest cancer treatment, care and support will remain a high priority for me.

Adjourned at 7.19 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 5 March 2012

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Matter of the Day

Golf: Rory McIlroy

Mr Speaker: Mr Mike Nesbitt has sought leave to make a statement on Rory McIlroy becoming the world number one golfer, which fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. I will call Mr Nesbitt to speak for up to three minutes on the subject. I will then call Members from the other parties as agreed with the Whips. Those Members will also have up to three minutes to speak on the subject. As Members know by now, there will be no opportunities for interventions, questions or a vote on the matter. I will certainly not take any points of order until this item of business is concluded. If that is clear, let us proceed.

Mr Nesbitt: Yesterday, Mark Allen from Antrim won the World Open snooker championship in China. He won the final by 10 frames to one. On any other day, that would be a fantastic headline, but not today. The headline today is this: Rory McIlroy is the world's number one golfer. A 22-year-old from Hollywood in County Down is a global superstar. He did it yesterday under the most intense pressure. Ahead of him, Tiger Woods was announcing that he was truly back. Rory had to listen to the roars of the crowd that were unmistakably evidence that Tiger was on a charge, the sort of charge that used to wilt the opposition, but not Rory, not yesterday.

On 19 September 2007, Rory was the world's number 876; today, he is number one. In a few weeks' time, at Augusta, he will attempt to win the Masters. If he does, Northern Ireland will hold three of world golf's four major trophies.

Rory is not just the world's number one; he is Northern Ireland's number one ambassador. Asked in front of tens of millions on live television yesterday how it felt to be the world number one, did he talk about himself? No, sir. He said:

"It's great to win this tournament; it's got a long history. On behalf of all the players, I'd like to thank everybody involved and especially the Nicklaus family and the children's hospital. They do so much great work for everyone and, on behalf of the players, I just want to say thank you".

What an ambassador. He did it with the support of his father, Gerry, and his mother, Rosie. His girlfriend was there, but we were not. I was in Valencia in 1982, reporting on Northern Ireland at the World Cup finals, when the late Harold McCusker lambasted the Tourist Board, the Industrial Development Board and everybody else who was not there to support the team. Thirty years on, I make this plea: let us stop making the same mistake.

The Minister with responsibility for tourism has said that she is reserving £0.5 million to promote and advertise the Irish Open at Portrush. I suggest that she starts today by buying a £233 ticket for BA flight 1526 from Heathrow to Miami tomorrow and that she sends a marketing executive to the Doral Golf Resort, where Rory will tee off on Thursday as world golf's number one player and Northern Ireland's number one ambassador.

On behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, thank you to the McIlroy family and Rory's coach, Michael Bannon.

Mr Weir: Often, as has been said, matters of the day are about very troubling matters, but this is a day of celebration. As a fan of the green baize, I pay tribute to Mark Allen on his tremendous success at the World Open in China. We hope that that is a sign of things to come.

Today, the focus is on Rory McIlroy. Last night, he became not simply the world number one but the second youngest person in the history of the sport to hold that position — only Tiger Woods was younger. Rory's win came after a good deal of pressure. He led going into the final round and held his nerve. It is a sign not simply of his skill but of his temperament that he held on to become world number one. He is following tradition, having been world number one on the amateur circuit and having won a number of tournaments, such as the Dubai Desert Classic, the Shanghai Masters and, most notably, the US Open last year. The manner in which he won the US Open vindicated his personality, as he came back after the difficulties of the US Masters to triumph.

As the Member said, he is an ambassador for Northern Ireland, particularly for North Down and his home town of Hollywood. All Members from North Down are very proud of his achievement, not least the courtesy and dignity with which he carries himself. That is not simply a measure of his character; it pays tribute to his upbringing by his parents, Gerry and Rosie. We look forward to having him back in North Down soon at the unveiling of the plaque that will mark the entrance to Hollywood and commemorate his achievements.

It is a bit disappointing that such a day of joy has been sullied by some of the remarks of the previous Member to speak, who tried to score points. There has, in fact, been considerable investment and support from Invest NI, including its advertising going live on the PGA tour this week and running through to June. Also, on 9 January, a reception was held in conjunction with David Feherty for 75 executives at the AT&T pro-am event at Pebble Beach. Invest NI will also provide hospitality at the US Open, putting us very

much at the heart of world golf. Mention was also made of the Portrush bid.

Leaving aside the petty sniping of Mr Nesbitt, I would like to say that the House is united. My party is sending out a clear signal: well done, Rory, you have done us all proud.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. This island has a wealth of golfing talent: Graeme McDowell, Darren Clarke and Pádraig Harrington. Now, Rory McIlroy is at the very top of the tree. If we remember a while back to his final-round collapse at the Masters in Augusta, many were saying that perhaps Rory did not have the mental toughness to get right up there, win a major championship and rise to the very top of his profession. Within a few short weeks, however, Rory won the US Open. It was an amazing performance, and it showed that top sportsmen need skill, talent, commitment and dedication but also mental toughness, and Rory McIlroy has it in spades.

As well as that, we heard recently from Gary Player, one of the greats of golf, who said Rory McIlroy has more natural talent than any player he has ever seen. That is some tribute. We also heard the great Jack Nicklaus saying that Rory will be up there for many years to come. As has been pointed out, at 22, he is the second-youngest world number one, second only to Tiger Woods. On behalf of my party and the Assembly, I send our congratulations to Rory and to all who helped him scale that massive height to become world number one.

We also send our congratulations to Mark Allen who, as has been mentioned, won his first world ranking event in China yesterday. Not that I am parochial, but, since we are on sporting matters, I also congratulate the Antrim team on their 3-14 to 1-8 win over Offaly in the national league on Saturday night.

Mr Attwood: I join other Members, everybody in the North of Ireland, in Ireland and in many places beyond in congratulating Rory McIlroy. I also congratulate Mark Allen on his achievement at the World Open in China.

It is appropriate on a day like this to recognise all the golfing giants of this island over many years. I remember as a teenager going to Shandon Park Golf Club, where they used to hold the Ulster Open golf competition. My father used to leave me there in the morning, and the purpose of my visit was to follow Christy O'Connor Snr, who you, Mr Speaker, and I will remember as the greatest golfer of his time in Ireland and one of the greatest of European golf at that time. It is appropriate to recognise all the O'Connors, the Darcys, the Fehertys and all the many players of the amateur game who created a golfing legacy in this part of the world that people such as Rory McIlroy and others can now inherit.

This is a uniquely privileged moment in the history of sport in Northern Ireland and on the island of Ireland because of Pádraig Harrington, Graeme McDowell, Darren Clarke and now Rory McIlroy. Whether Rory McIlroy does, in the fullness of time, become the greatest golfer the world has ever seen, this is certainly the greatest moment that Irish golf has seen because of all those who contributed to the success.

As a somewhat less accomplished golfer, I can appreciate the difficulties of the game. However, we can all watch with

respect, pride and wonder at Rory McIlroy's achievements in recent years and months and over the past weekend.

Mr Lunn: I also join in the general congratulations to Rory McIlroy. His achievement is amazing, but it was predictable. This has been where he belonged for quite a number of years. I think I read recently that he still holds the course record at Portrush, where he knocked it round in 61, I think, as a 16-year-old amateur. It must be one of the few places in the world where the amateur record is less than the professional one.

12.15 pm

Pat referred to Rory's collapse at the Masters. I hope that we have heard the last of that word. That was not a collapse last year; that was a 21-year-old who led a major tournament for three and a half rounds and then the pressure got to him, as it has got to many golfers in the last nine of Augusta down the years.

It is terrific for him. When I was watching it last night, I noticed that the American crowds now scream "Get in the hole" every time somebody hits the ball. In Tiger Woods's earlier days, they used to scream "You're the man" or "You the man". I must say that they are not shouting that at Rory, but it is obvious that he is now "the man" in golf and will be for many years to come. He has proved his worth and will continue to win tournaments. He will not win them all. I think that some people expect him to win the Masters as well. That probably will not happen, but he will have some record by the time he has finished. I am glad that everybody in the House is sending congratulations to him, his coach and his family.

Mark Allen was also mentioned. That is a marvellous achievement as well, particularly given that he criticised the food, the smell, the venue and the table. He went on and won the tournament, which is excellent. He is a different character to Rory, but, hopefully, they will both be marvellous ambassadors for Northern Ireland for years to come.

Mr Allister: It is a pleasure to join in congratulating Rory McIlroy on his remarkable achievement. It has been predicted for some time, but the attainment of it is no less remarkable. We all salute him in that regard and comment on his maturity on and off the golf course. That betokens the man and is something that we look forward to seeing continue.

I also join in congratulating Mark Allen on his considerable achievement in winning the World Open in China. He comes from Antrim, and it is good to see that success as well.

When we salute the golfing genius of Rory McIlroy, we must also remember that this weekend Northern Ireland said goodbye to the comic genius, Frank Carson. I am sure that he will be long remembered in the House. We issue our total congratulations to the McIlroy family and our condolences to the Carson family.

Mr Agnew: On behalf of the Green Party, I congratulate Rory McIlroy. What more can be said that has not been said already, not just today, but in a previous Matter of the Day on Rory McIlroy? In fact, when I looked back to see what I said then, I saw how many times his name has been mentioned in the Chamber, often in relation to tourism. As a member of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, I must say that there is nothing that the Assembly can do that will match the benefit that Northern Ireland will gain from the

reputation of Rory McIlroy and the positive focus that he has put on Northern Ireland. Our role is to make sure that we make the best of that benefit and to ensure that, now that we are in the spotlight, we show our best face to the world.

I also add to the congratulations to Mark Allen on his tremendous victory. It is important to celebrate those who are at the top of their game, but it is also important to remember that the only way that we will have future champions is if we ensure that we get things right at grass-roots level — that pun was not so much unintended as unavoidable. At a time when budgets are stretched and finances are difficult, we must realise the benefit we get from not just sport but the arts. Indeed, we stood here recently to celebrate the success of 'The Shore'. Sport and the arts are key to how we enjoy life as a society. Today, we should remember all those who compete and gain benefit from the sport facilities that we have and remember the importance of those facilities going forward.

I finish by congratulating Rory McIlroy. I believe that he will have much more success in the future, and I wish him well.

Ministerial Statement

North/South Ministerial Council: Agriculture

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle.

With your permission, I wish to make a statement in compliance with section 52 of the NI Act 1998, regarding the seventeenth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in agriculture sectoral format. It was held in Armagh on Wednesday 8 February. Junior Minister Jonathan Bell and I represented the Executive, and I chaired the meeting. The Dublin Government were represented by Simon Coveney TD, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine. This statement has been agreed with Mr Bell, and I make the statement on behalf of both of us.

The Council discussed developments in the debate on the reform of the common agricultural policy, and Ministers noted the most significant issues that have emerged to date and the next steps in the CAP reform process. These included the distribution of the CAP budget to member states, the movement to a flat-rate payment within member states and the possible introduction of a greening component to the pillar 1 budget. Ministers also noted recent developments in international trade negotiations, agrifood matters and climate change conferences.

The Council welcomed a presentation that had been made by Animal Health Ireland to the all-island animal health and welfare steering group, which included details of existing and potential future areas for cross-border industry co-operation. Ministers also welcomed an updated report on the delivery of the 2011-12 all-island animal health and welfare strategy action plan, including the completion of a scoping paper on all-island animal disease surveillance priorities; the continuation of close liaison during negotiations with the EU Commission on the proposed new EU animal health law; final preparations for the submission to the EU of applications for Aujeszky's disease-free status; and agreement by officials to seek to align dealer registration systems. A further progress report on the activities to deliver the all-island animal health and welfare strategy will be made to Ministers at the next NSMC agriculture meeting.

Ministers noted that the plant health and pesticides steering group had met in December 2011. Subgroups to implement the work programme have been convened, and a full progress report will be presented to Ministers at the next NSMC agriculture meeting.

Ministers also welcomed the significant ongoing cross-border co-operation in dealing with the challenges posed by outbreaks of phytophthora ramorum in Japanese larch forests and more recent outbreaks of phytophthora lateralis affecting Lawson cypress trees.

The Council agreed to hold its next agriculture meeting in June or July 2012.

Mr Frew (The Chairperson of the Committee for

Agriculture and Rural Development): I thank the Minister for her statement. A presentation was made by Animal Health Ireland on all-island animal health issues. Was the Schmallenberg virus discussed? What problems still exist for an animal health and welfare strategy, given the lack of a credible eradication plan for bovine TB in Northern Ireland?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I will update the House on the Schmallenberg virus. We raised it at the start of the meeting, and I am happy to run through some of the points. Since it is a new disease, it is important that we take every opportunity to alert farmers and people in the agriculture community to those factors.

We are currently carrying out targeted surveillance for signs of the disease. It is important to emphasise that the positive cases that are being reported are indicative of a spread that took place last year, rather than a spread that has occurred this year. Information about the disease is available on the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute websites, as well as signposted on the rural portals. I encourage farmers who are in any doubt to take the opportunity to look there. Among the things they should look for are birth deformities. Those will be obvious to farmers, and farmers will be looking for them, particularly now as we enter lambing season. I encourage all farmers to seek advice if they are in any doubt. It is important that we detect the disease early, if, in fact, we have it. I also take the opportunity to encourage anybody who is involved in importing animals not to import them from infected areas. That is very important.

The Member also raised a point around TB and brucellosis. As the Member knows, TB, in particular, is very emotive because it involves the whole issue of culling badgers. There is no doubt about it: TB is a complex disease. There is no quick solution or quick fix. If there were, we would have been able to do it. We are carefully watching what is happening with the court challenges in England and Wales. If they withstand the legal challenge, I may have to reassess my position. I need evidence to back up any action that I take, so we have to be very mindful of those ongoing court challenges.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister give us more detail on her discussions with Simon Coveney about CAP reform?

Mrs O'Neill: CAP reform was a major topic at the meeting. We went through all the issues with greening and the definition of active farmer. We majored on the implications of moving to a flat-rate payment, with a particular emphasis on what that redistribution of payments would mean for farmers. We also discussed the nature of the CAP reform negotiations and how they would play out. We are lucky that Simon Coveney will, we hope, hold the presidency during the first half of 2013, and I think that that will be very important for us as we move through those intense negotiations.

Minister Coveney also reported on his discussions with European Commissioner, Dacian Cioloş, when he visited Dublin on 19 January. I know that the Committee was present and listened to Dacian Cioloş, and I also had an opportunity to meet him. The CAP negotiations are intensifying as time goes on, and our relationship with Simon Coveney will be important over the next year.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for her statement. Will she tell us whether she believes that her proposals to move TB testing in-house will reduce the number and capacity of local private vets and, therefore, their ability to assist in tackling any local or cross-border outbreak?

Mrs O'Neill: I value the impact of our local vets. Over the past 10 months, I have spoken to many vets about moving to lay testing for TB and the savings that that would bring.

I think that our vets will continue to play an important role and that this was simply an efficient manner in which to move forward.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for her statement. In relation to international trade negotiations, has the Minister had any discussions on how the meat-processing sector might be assisted to obtain greater access to export certificates in order to export to China?

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

Mrs O'Neill: That is an issue. I met a local company that is having particular problems with exporting to China because of the nature of the certificate. In this instance, pigs reared somewhere in the Twenty-six Counties and slaughtered here cannot be exported to China. I have taken up the issue with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and OFMDFM, and I am also in discussion with Simon Coveney, the Minister in the Twenty-six Counties. We are exploring a number of avenues to ensure that our trade is not disadvantaged.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for her statement, in which she mentioned the all-island animal health and welfare steering group. She will be aware that concerns continue to be expressed about the welfare of animals engaged in the entertainment industry, particularly circuses. Did or could that aspect of animal well-being surface at any of the meetings, or could the steering group take it on board to ensure that everything is properly dealt with?

Mrs O'Neill: The four items on the agenda are CAP reform, rural development, animal health and plant health. To date, the issue of non-farmed animals has not been raised at meetings. The legislation on the welfare of animals that came in last year did not include non-farmed animals, but, if the Member wants to write to me, I would be happy to explore that further.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members to try to address their questions to the statement.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Minister for her statement. Do her counterparts in the Irish Republic share our concerns about the possible greening component of the pillar 1 budget? Has the Minister had any other contact with, for instance, the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) about the greening proposals?

12.30 pm

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Broadly speaking, we hold very similar views to DEFRA and the Minister in the South. In general terms, the concerns are around getting a proper balance between delivering income support for farmers and delivering for the environment. The proposals that are on the table seem to be too unwieldy and bureaucratic for farmers to manage. That is the point that we keep trying to put to the Commission.

We are absolutely committed to looking after the environment; that is vital to farmers' future livelihood. Our environmental standards are actually quite good. The point that we are trying to make to the Commission is that one size does not fit all. What happens on a farm in France is very different to what happens on a farm here. The

Commission needs to be mindful of that in taking a firm position on the way forward.

Mr T Clarke: Minister, while others welcome the statement, I will just note it because it is very short. Given that the meeting had such a short agenda, would it not be better value for money to have a video link?

Mrs O'Neill: No, I do not agree. I found the meeting very beneficial. As I said, we talked about four key areas on CAP reform. You might not feel that it is a priority, but CAP reform is a massive priority for the farming community. Rural development is a massive priority for the wider rural community and in ensuring that we support the wider rural community. Animal health, plant health and the free movement of animals on the island to open up more trade opportunities are all key issues that we need to tackle.

I remind the Member that I have half an hour in which to make a statement. I am open to taking as many questions as possible, which is why I kept the statement to the length that I did. I also remind the Member that my door upstairs is always open if there are any other issues that he wants to take up with me.

Mr Swann: Did you or Minister Coveney raise any concerns about the fact that food security is not mentioned in the CAP reform? Is it intended that either of you will bring it to the table in the discussions?

Mrs O'Neill: Food security is always on the agenda. The proposals, as drafted, do nothing to enhance our food security. You have to keep putting that point to the Commission. What is it that it is looking for? Food security is apparently moving up the Commission's agenda, but that does not seem to be borne out in the current proposals. We are very concerned about food security, and it is always on the radar of the discussion on the entire CAP reform.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members to check that their mobile phones are not causing interference. I am still picking up some noise.

Mr Dallat: I left my mobile phone at home today, so I am not guilty.

I welcome the fact that the meeting was held in that wonderful city of Armagh, which is second only to Derry city. Video conferencing would be no substitute for that.

I am sure that the Minister will agree that TB has cost millions of pounds and has been the subject of many worrying reports from the Audit Office. Bearing in mind that there are no TB targets in the Programme for Government, does the Minister agree that it is time to call time on TB once and for all?

Mrs O'Neill: I absolutely agree with you about trying to get to the stage where we can eradicate TB. We have made really good progress on brucellosis, but, sadly, TB is lagging behind. The problem is that there is no quick fix or simple solution, but we are actively working through that. It is important that the farming community can have confidence that I am taking every action possible to address TB. As I said, I am watching carefully what is going on with the court challenges in England and Wales, because that will feed into any move that I might make in the future.

Mr Buchanan: Can the Minister indicate what agreement, if any, has been reached by other member states on any of

these issues? When does she anticipate that an agreement will be forthcoming?

Mrs O'Neill: The timetable that was set out by the European Commission is already starting to slip. We can see that things will not move forward as quickly as it had originally hoped. We hope that a decision will be taken in the early part of 2013, sometime between January and June, when the Dublin Government have the presidency. That is the timetable that we are working to.

Different member states are picking their battles on the issues that are important to them. We know what our issues are and what is important to us. I think that negotiations will intensify over the next 12 months, and I am happy to keep the House up to date on all that.

Mr Allister: I note that four weeks passed before this statement was made. Is that because there was nothing of substance to report? I note comments throughout the statement such as, "We discussed such and such", "We noted recent developments", "We welcomed a presentation", "We welcomed an update", "We noted such and such". However, there were no decisions. The only decision that seems to have been taken at the meeting —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Can we have a question, please?

Mr Allister: The only decision that seems to have been taken at the meeting was to meet again in June or July. Is it correct that there were no decisions? If so, does that not indicate that it was a waste of time — a talking shop?

Mrs O'Neill: Again, if the Member thinks that CAP reform is a waste of time and a waste of a discussion, I certainly would not agree with him. Those issues need to be dealt with. The fact that the final decisions will be taken during Ireland's presidency, while Simon Coveney is Minister, is key. It is about working across this small island that we live on for the benefit of the free movement of animals, of all animal health and welfare issues and of the fortress Ireland policy that has helped us in respect of bluetongue and all the other issues. There is massive potential and benefit to be had for the rural community.

Executive Committee Business

Marine Bill: Second Stage

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

That the Second Stage of the Marine Bill [NIA 5/11-15] be agreed.

I thank my colleagues in the Executive for their support in bringing the Bill to the Assembly and the Environment Committee for its work leading up to the introduction of the legislation. I also acknowledge the work of my predecessor, the Minister of the Environment, and that of my officials on the marine side in the Department who, I have to say, bring conviction to the cause of marine management and marine issues generally. All that needs to be acknowledged in the context of the Bill. I hope that all the relationships that have been growing between the Department and external groups, between Ministers, and between the Department and the Committee will deepen and strengthen as the Bill progresses on its legislative path. I believe that there are some hurdles yet to be jumped in respect of the content of this marine legislation. I also acknowledge the work of marine stakeholders. When the Bill was being prepared, I gathered together a cluster of stakeholders representing the marine interest, including people from NGOs and others from outside government who have an independent and challenging view of the role of government when it comes to marine issues. Their input heretofore and in the future will be very important in managing this in the best possible way.

It is widely recognised that the marine environment is not a limitless resource and that an approach based on sustainable development principles is needed. That is at the heart of the proposed legislation. All decisions in the marine area or those that may have implications for it must be made under the legislation in accord with marine policy statements and the eventual marine plan for Northern Ireland. In my view, the fact that all decisions in the marine area have to be made in that image suggests that marine management needs to be consolidated, brought together and made more coherent and cohesive by having an organisation that will take that sort of approach to marine issues. I will touch on that later in my opening remarks.

The Bill is about realising a vision for clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas. As Minister, I keep saying that our built, natural and archaeological heritage is part of the quality of the lives that we lead. In this part of the world, more than in any other part of these islands, we are blessed with a concentration of riches on the built, natural and archaeological side that reflects favourably on the quality of our lives and is at the heart of growing tourism spend. In my view, the marine environment can be part of that. How we manage and positively exploit the marine environment can be part of a strategy to grow jobs going forward and deepen the sense that this part of the world is renowned for, and can become better known for, being green and clean.

We already have the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, key parts of which extend to Northern Ireland waters. My Department is the marine planning authority for Northern Ireland offshore, which includes small portions of marine waters west and south of the Isle of Man. It is not simply the area of water 12 nautical miles out from the coast of

Northern Ireland. We have also transposed the marine strategy framework directive, which sets the overall goal for the Governments of London, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to have good environmental status in our European seas by 2020. The UK Government are committed, as we are, to taking forward that approach in a marine protected zone strategy.

The Marine Bill is the final piece of enabling legislation. In its current form, it has 48 clauses, five Parts and two schedules. It builds on the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 that was passed by the London Administration. It introduces a new management framework for Northern Ireland's marine waters, further eases the regulatory burden on marine industries and provides greater protection for the marine environment. It will establish a strategic system of marine planning in Northern Ireland's inshore region, which is our marine waters out to 12 nautical miles and also captures the waters of Strangford lough. It will introduce nature conservation measures that will seek to ensure that biodiversity is protected and international and European commitments are met.

If you think about it, Mr Deputy Speaker, Strangford lough is the most protected inland water in Europe, with more multiple designations than any other piece of water: 1,500 of our 2,000 species of life in the North of Ireland are located in Strangford lough. If that does not confirm the need for good marine management, I do not know what does.

The Bill will also introduce further reforms to marine licensing for certain electricity generating projects. That is vital, given that the London Government have recently issued their twenty-sixth call for marine licensing applications for gas and other explorations. Bearing in mind that licences may well be awarded in the latter part of this year or into next year, it is very important that the Bill captures the opportunities that may be developing for marine licensing for electricity generating projects. I will come back to that later.

It is also timely to note the likely costs of the marine plan that may arise from this legislation. Officials estimate that as we develop a Northern Ireland marine plan over a three-to four-year period, the total cost will be around £2 million, which will include staff time and other preparations for the plan itself. Thereafter, the management of the plan will be around £200,000 per annum for five years as we identify, designate and manage the marine conservation zones that are identified further to the marine plan and are part and parcel of the architecture of the Bill.

12.45 pm

There are key differences between planning at sea and on land. The marine area is three-dimensional and dynamic. Multiple uses of the same location, simultaneously or during different seasons, happens more often at sea than on land, and, by and large, the sea is a public resource with general rights for activities such as fishing and innocent passage. I am determined to take the opportunities that are presented by the Bill to ensure that the new approach to the management of our marine environment is the right one and that we learn from lessons elsewhere. In its current form, the Bill does not travel the road that we should follow to live up to the standards that I have just set, which are to have the right approach and to learn lessons from other jurisdictions. I will touch on that in the conclusion to my speech.

Part 2 and schedule 1 establish the Department of the Environment (DOE) as the marine planning authority for the Northern Ireland inshore region. Extensive consultation on the preparation of a marine plan is a key element, and I want it to be inclusive. There will be ongoing consultation with other Departments that hold marine functions, related marine planning authorities in other Administrations, including the South, all those likely to be affected by marine plans, and members of the public. DOE is a member of the Irish Sea Forum, which brings together all who have an interest in the Irish Sea in all the jurisdictions that touch on the Irish Sea, so that we can better manage that part of our shared assets.

The preparation and publication of a statement of public participation in the plan is a requirement and an essential part of the process. Following public consultation on the plan, there is provision in the Bill for an independent investigation to consider relevant matters before the plan is finalised. Marine plans will also be subject to an assessment of sustainability and that will incorporate the strategic environmental assessment that is required under EC directive and other relevant assessments.

Once agreed by the Executive and published, all public authorities, including London and NI Departments, district councils, statutory undertakers and NDPBs, must take authorisation from or enforce decisions in accordance with the plan, unless relevant considerations indicate otherwise. Other types of decisions must be taken with regard to the plan. There is a difference between those two legal thresholds: taking authorisation or enforcing decisions in accordance with the plan is clearly a higher threshold than other types of decisions having to be taken with regard to the plan. There are also requirements for the Department to keep a range of matters that relate to marine planning under review, to periodically review progress with marine plans and to lay certain reports before the Assembly. Thereafter, plans will be amended as necessary. There is also a requirement to report to the Assembly on the effectiveness of individual marine plans and on marine plans in general. Those will be laid in the Assembly every three years and six years respectively.

Part 3 of the Bill deals with marine nature conservation. Northern Ireland's seas support around half of our biodiversity, including many threatened marine animal and plant species. Indeed, some of those species have only recently been discovered. For example — this is little known — 27 new types of sponges, which are unknown anywhere else in the world, have recently been discovered off Rathlin Island. On a visit to Rathlin Island last year, I was privileged to see footage of some of those newly discovered sponges. It is no coincidence that the waters around Rathlin Island have been identified as a world biodiversity hotspot by the WWF. I hope that Members will agree that such important habitats and species may require managed protection.

Current priorities include a swathe of marine special protection areas for birds and marine special areas of conservation for habitats. Strangford lough, areas around Rathlin Island and Murlough Bay are all governed under special areas of conservation for habitats, and a number of new areas will be designated in the near future, including Red Bay, the Skerries and the Causeway area.

Traditionally, nature conservation in the marine environment has lagged behind land-based protection measures. That

is, in part, due to dangerous working conditions, the specialised expertise that is required and, of course, the cost of equipment, training and suitable craft. I acknowledge that there are dangerous working conditions and that members of this government, through the NIEA — Northern Ireland Environment Agency — undertake dangerous activities when they dive to map out the seabed in order to bring to life the conservation measures and designations to which I have referred.

We have a responsibility under European law to designate areas in our seas to protect certain species and habitats that are considered to be of conservational importance at a European level. Although that EC measure is important, it does not go far enough. We need a mechanism to protect nationally important species and habitats as well, and that is why I intend to legislate for marine nature conservation measures in the Bill.

A new designation process, leading to marine conservation zones (MCZs), will be introduced. Those zones will have flexible boundaries, timescales and levels of protection. Equally importantly, they will take account of socio-economic conditions. They will be assessed on a site-by-site basis; some will have minimal protections and others will require high protection. I want to make it clear that, as we go forward, the views of fishing and other organisations with commercial interests will be taken into account. It is crucial that we get the balance right between conservation and other activities, especially those that are potentially conflicting in the same part of the sea. Ideally, the designation of MCZs will be carried out in tandem with any marine plan.

The Bill will help to deliver on London's obligation to establish an ecologically coherent network of marine protected areas (MPAs) by 2020, which is a requirement under the marine strategy framework directive. The Bill defines the MPA network as comprising European marine sites; that is, special protection areas and special areas of conservation together with MCZs. It will also contribute to meeting our wider commitments under the birds and habitats directives. I hope that the Bill will be an argument, a defence and a rebuttal in the event of any infraction threat in the future.

As with the marine plan, stakeholder involvement will be an important element of MCZ designation. Stakeholders will be fully consulted before the designation of an MCZ. The Department of the Environment will take full account of any economic or social consequences of designation. The Department plans to develop detailed guidance notes to accompany Part 3 of the Bill that will further explain the designation process. The Bill also places a new general duty on Departments and other public authorities to help to further the conservation objectives that are set for MCZs. The introduction of such a duty will help to raise the profile and importance of marine diversity.

The Bill enables the Department to make by-laws to protect MCZs in the NI inshore region. By-laws will be used to prohibit or restrict otherwise unregulated activities that may be detrimental to the MCZs; for example, to restrict the use of jet skis in a particular area, or to define where leisure crafts can anchor. I stress that there have been examples where the interests of the Department and obligations under law have been reconciled with sporting and recreational use: the forthcoming understandings between the Department and the Royal Yachting Association concerning its use

of Strangford lough are evidence of that. However, by-laws cannot be used to restrict activities that are already managed through existing legislation or which are the responsibility of other Departments.

There are, of course, provisions for new offences. Anyone who acts in a reckless manner that causes harm to an MCZ will be committing an offence. Anyone who contravenes any by-law will be committing an offence. If convicted, fines of up to £5,000, based on the current amount of a level 5 fine, may be imposed. There is also a general offence of acts of deliberate or reckless damage to the protected features of an MCZ. That general offence is intended to deal with potential acts of environmental vandalism that will be difficult to predict and to control through by-laws.

Another key aspect of the Bill is enforcement powers to ensure that adequate protection is afforded to a marine environment. Those include the use of fixed penalty notices for minor offences. It is vital that the enforcement authorities, principally the Department, have the powers that they need. Therefore, there is provision for the Department to be given a suite of enforcement powers necessary to carry out its functions in the marine area effectively. For example, there is a power to access premises under the authority of a magistrate's warrant to investigate marine, nature and conservation offences. I stress that enforcement, be it in respect of marine, planning or environment, is the flip side of good planning. You cannot have good planning, whether on land or at sea, if you do not also have good enforcement. In that regard, I intend to escalate the enforcement activities of the Department across the range of its functions, as I have demonstrated in a number of cases over the past number of months.

Part 4 of the Bill deals with marine licensing. The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 introduced a new system of marine licensing that extends to Northern Ireland. The Act allows for the use of special procedures in respect of certain electricity works. The Marine Bill extends the application of those special procedures to marine licence applications in Northern Ireland. That will apply in situations where both a marine licence from DOE and a generation station consent from DETI are required and will allow for parallel consideration of applications for those consents. I stress again that although the Marine Bill introduces a new licensing regime, DOE and DETI are working together and will continue to do so on the best management of the issue. We will introduce administrative mechanisms that avoid duplication and aspire to an outcome such as that where a licence is required from DOE or consent is required from DETI, only one environmental impact assessment will serve both applications.

The aim of that provision is to simplify the process for licensing, where possible, to ensure consistency of approach throughout the UK and to remove any barrier to inward investment. The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and I were recently at an event at the Harbour Commission in respect of the SeaGen project at the narrows at Strangford lough. The people behind SeaGen have made the justified claim that modern tidal energy has its birthplace in Strangford lough. It is now a world reference point when it comes to tidal opportunities and tidal technology. That demonstrates that the North can be at the cutting edge of renewables technology and that, the more that we exploit, in a positive way, renewable opportunities

and technology, the better we will be able to create jobs, become self-sufficient in energy and, ultimately, potentially and arguably make renewables the single biggest economic opportunity that the North of Ireland has.

That said, I remain committed to the principle and the operation of a marine management organisation (MMO). That is not yet in the Bill, but I will continue to make the argument with my Executive colleagues that a marine management organisation should be part of the architecture of the Bill and part of marine policy and practice. The objective of furthering the sustainable development of our seas will be better served by integrating the marine functions that are currently splintered across Departments and their agencies. That is the thesis that informs the argument for an MMO. When the Executive approved the Bill to come before the Assembly, they noted that there would be further exploration of options in respect of the achievement of improved marine co-ordination. I welcome that statement as far as it goes, but I will welcome it fully only when it matures and evolves into the Executive endorsement of an MMO as the best way to give life and expression to that worthy intention.

There is a wide range of reasons —

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Attwood: I will.

Mr Allister: Can the Minister shed some light on what is likely to be the outworking of the relationship in regard to the governance of inshore waters, which will fall under his Department, and the governance of offshore waters, which, presumably, will fall under the Secretary of State's governance?

If there is an MMO for offshore waters, how does that leave the situation with inshore waters? Is there a difficulty that, when policy statements are devised for one, there could be conflict with the policy that is thought appropriate for the other? How does that dovetail?

1.00 pm

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. I found it difficult to decode whether he was in support of a marine management organisation or hostile to the concept. I have no doubt that Mr Agnew will be firmly in favour of an MMO, and I hope that Mr Allister was hinting, if not confirming, that he, too, would support the principle of an MMO.

I will answer his question. The conflict that he referred to in managing our inshore or offshore waters suggests, in my view, that the conclusion should be that waters that fall to the competence of the Northern Ireland Government, be it Strangford lough or inshore waters out to 12 nautical miles, would be better managed through an MMO to reconcile the potential conflicts that exist. Other jurisdictions in Britain have the model of an MMO. They recognise that, to capture all the interests, which, at times, can be competing, it is better to try to reconcile them by having all the relevant functions gathered together in the one place to be managed in the one place to have better outcomes. So, that is the model that I want to adopt, and I hope that Mr Allister was indicating support for that model.

Our management, however, will extend only to those waters that fall within our responsibility, which is Strangford lough and waters out to 12 nautical miles. Beyond that, responsibility falls to the London Government, save that small bit south and west of the Isle of Man. Given that London has responsibility for a vast element of the Irish Sea, there is, as I indicated, an Irish Sea forum and consistent and ongoing contact with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in London through Caroline Spelman. This Friday, I will be in Europe at the EU environmental council. I will be the first Minister of the Environment since restoration who has attended that gathering to give voice to the needs of the environment —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask Members to refrain from having conversations in the Chamber. The Minister is speaking on legislation. If you wish to have conversation, please go elsewhere.

Mr Attwood: I will visit Europe to give expression to the fact that I think that the environmental interest has to be greater asserted by the Northern Ireland Government on issues of marine management, not only in the European context but through our relationship with DEFRA. If you look at the direction of travel being deployed by Environment Ministers in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, you will see that all three of us are becoming more and more assertive in our relationship with DEFRA to ensure that our own interests are protected and that our views on that area that falls outside our responsibility, including vast areas of the Irish Sea, are heard and acknowledged. I hope that that deals with Mr Allister's questions.

In my view, all that informs the narrative and conclusion that an MMO is a better way to manage the potential competing and conflicting marine interests. The best example of that in recent times is one that is well known to this House, because we had a debate on it, and well known to the Environment Committee in particular, because it occupies its mind: the ongoing situation with the modiolus modiolus in Strangford lough, the horse mussel biogenic reef. The potential still hangs over this Government that Europe will take infraction proceedings arising from its view that we have failed to manage Strangford lough and the modiolus threat as well as we can.

I commend the Bill to the House. I think that it is important legislation and that we are somewhat behind other jurisdictions in these islands. A Marine Bill, a marine plan, marine conservation zones and other elements that I may touch on in my reply to the debate constitute a strong and sound strategy moving forward. However, I would not want to conclude by saying to the House that there are still issues that the Executive, the Committee and Assembly Members have to get their heads around in terms of the content and architecture of the Bill. I hope that this is the start of that conversation, which, in my view, will lead to highly desirable outcomes.

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): As Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment, I welcome the Marine Bill, a Bill that is long overdue and that will, at last, bring us into line with the rest of the UK. The Bill will establish a new framework for Northern Ireland's seas based on marine planning, improved management for marine nature conservation and streamlining of marine licensing. I welcome the fact that the Bill outlines the process for the Department to prepare,

consult on and publish a marine plan, particularly the publication of a statement of public participation. That will allow interested parties to get involved at an early stage, which will, hopefully, ensure that the planning process runs more smoothly. It was an issue that the previous Committee welcomed when scrutinising the Planning Bill for our terrestrial areas, and it is something that the current Committee very much welcomes in this Bill.

I also welcome the powers within the Bill for the Department to designate marine conservation zones, although, as with any legislation, it will be the enforcement of that power that the Committee will be most interested in. The Committee notes that, through the Bill, the Department of the Environment will gain new powers of enforcement in relation to marine conservation zones. I hope that that will help to avoid the types of circumstances that we are now seeing with Strangford lough, which the Minister mentioned.

When the Committee was briefed by departmental officials at its meeting on 1 March, members asked questions about the cost and resource implications of the introduction of the Bill. Although officials were, admittedly, put on the spot during the meeting, we need some idea of the cost and resource implications of the Bill. We need to know that it is affordable and that proper resources can and will be allocated to its implementation. I am glad that the Minister, at the start of his speech, set out his plan for spending at the initial stage and over the next five years.

Given that the Bill introduces a whole new function that needs to be resourced, that of marine planning, and given that there will, undoubtedly, be increased costs due to the need for more monitoring and the new enforcement role that will be taken on, we need to make sure that we have the money and resources available for that, otherwise the Bill will have little impact.

Mr Storey: Given the Minister's concluding comments on MMOs, has the Committee given any consideration to the additional cost of such a structure as the Minister is keen on, albeit that some of his Executive colleagues are not supportive of that process? Has the Committee given specific consideration to any proposals, even the establishment of an MMO?

Ms Lo: As you probably know, I am fairly new to the Committee. I am not sure whether the previous Committee considered that, but, at the moment, we have not been looking at the inclusion of an MMO and therefore the Committee has not, as far as I know, discussed the issue of resourcing it.

We also need a proper timeline for implementation of the Bill. The previous Environment Committee scrutinised numerous Bills during the last mandate, but only now are we seeing them reach full implementation. We cannot allow this Bill to drag on. We need to see it being implemented as quickly as possible after Royal Assent. There is too much at stake for any delays to happen.

The Committee has long been concerned with the possible infraction proceedings from the failure to implement the wild birds directive. Officials have told members that the introduction of the Marine Bill will go a long way to helping the Department to meet its obligations under that directive. That is certainly to be welcomed.

As we all know, marine functions are currently spread over several Departments. The Committee is aware that the idea of a marine management organisation was considered for this Bill, but, ultimately, not included. Opinions differ within the Committee as to the benefits of having a single body to manage our seas. However, members are of one voice on the need for proper joined-up working between the relevant Departments.

In the absence of a marine management organisation, the Committee will want to know how marine functions will be co-ordinated and managed. Members were pleased to hear that an interdepartmental marine co-ordination group is in existence, and that discussions between Departments are ongoing. However, the proof of the success of that approach will be in the delivery of comprehensive protection of our seas while maximising their economic and social potential. We know that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) has different priorities in relation to marine life; fishing being the main one. However, if a Northern Ireland Marine Bill is to work, Departments must show a willingness to work together.

As well as ensuring that Departments work together to implement the Bill, we need to ensure that local councils are engaged in the process. As we know, planning powers are due to devolve to councils in due course. Although marine planning will remain with central government, they will need to liaise with local councils to ensure compatibility with terrestrial planning, particularly where there is an overlap of responsibilities. Councils, along with every other public body, will be obliged to take the Marine Bill and marine plan into account, and, so, must play an integral part in their development. The statement of public participation is something that councils need to be kept fully aware of, and communication will be key.

Continuing on the theme of communication, we realise that marine life does not stop at the border. Northern Ireland must communicate regularly with the Republic of Ireland on marine issues. Officials have told the Committee that the South is some way behind with its marine legislation, but members were encouraged to hear that there has been liaison between officials and that built into the Bill is the requirement for the Republic of Ireland to be given notification of a marine plan.

Mr Deputy Speaker, at this juncture, if I may, I will add something from my personal perspective as the Member for South Belfast. I would like to place on record that, personally, I would like to have seen provisions for a marine management organisation included in the Bill. I feel that it makes more sense to house all marine functions in one independent body, rather than see them split across several Departments, as the Minister himself alluded to. I know that the Minister fought for that inclusion in the Bill and was not successful. However, I believe that to be an issue that requires further consideration. Therefore, I support and welcome the Minister's commitment in his statement today to continue to pursue that issue. We should perhaps introduce the Bill first, then, further down the line, have again the debate — or dialogue, as the Minister mentioned — about a marine management organisation. Hopefully, by then, the merits of such a body will be more apparent to all and we will be in a better position to establish it.

1.15 pm

As soon as the House refers the Bill to the Committee, we will call for written submissions from interested organisations and individuals. Members will be extremely interested to hear their views. I look forward to a good ongoing working relationship with the officials to ensure that my Committee is able to scrutinise the legislation properly. On behalf of the Committee, I support the principles of the Bill and look forward to scrutinising it closely at Committee Stage.

Mr Hamilton: I support the Marine Bill for many reasons, not least because it follows on from GB legislation. I also speak in favour of the Bill because we are very blessed in this part of the world; Northern Ireland is exceptionally blessed with a wonderful marine environment. I know that from the constituency that I represent. The Minister has, quite possibly, already mentioned Strangford more than even I will be able to manage in the debate. I, along with Miss McIlveen and others, represent a constituency that is exceptionally —

Mr Weir: It is just as well that Jim Shannon is not here.

Mr Hamilton: I think that Jim would be able to top us all with references to Strangford lough. I know that he is doing his bit in another place.

From representing that constituency, we know full well the wonderful marine heritage and environment that we have. Oftentimes, we take it for granted; we just expect everything that is there to be there. In fact, many of us do not even know exactly what is there. The Minister talked about some of the species that have been found recently and how much of what we have is unique, not just in the British Isles but Europe and the entire world. We are exceptionally well blessed with our marine environment. If we have a marine environment that is so exceptional, it is absolutely worth protecting. Anything proportionate that we can do to protect that and to build on existing protections has to be welcomed.

From other debates that we have had concentrating on Strangford lough, the Minister will know that I am a great believer in the need for balance in the protection of our environment, not least in the protection of our marine environment. Even though I support the Bill, I want to raise some issues of concern. Perhaps “concern” is too strong a word, but I seek clarity and assurance on some issues — some clarity has already been provided by the Minister in his contribution — principally around marine conservation zones. Those designations are not new in the world. If Jim Wells were here, he would tell us that we lecture other parts of the world, particularly Third World countries, about protecting the environment even though many of them already have designations that are similar to marine conservation zones and have had so for several decades. We are a little bit late to the game in that respect. It is not just us; the whole of Great Britain is fairly late to the game. They are not unique; they are not the only marine designation that we have within our power. The Minister's Department will put in place other designations, and this builds on that. I understand why they are being legislated for. Indeed, I support the legislation. Like other aspects of the Bill, if done properly and managed properly, good marine management should concern no one. Everyone should welcome good, sound, well-balanced and proportionate marine management.

The difficulty comes from stepping into the unknown with a new designation like that. There is a concern that, in trying to do good, we may be overzealous in the number of marine conservation zones that we designate and in the protections that are offered in those zones. When something new talks about protection, it is understandable that some interests in society will be concerned about what it means for them and their particular pursuit. The Minister has already stated that different layers and levels of protection will be offered in marine conservation zones, but it is important to stress that those levels of protection need to be developed with a scientific approach coming from the Department and with very good and thorough consultation with those who will be affected in our communities.

Clause 12(7) states that we should take account of the “economic or social consequences” of designations. It is imperative that those economic considerations are to the fore as well as environmental concerns. I have some concern that the explanatory note states that, in circumstances:

“Where an area contains features which are rare, threatened or declining ... greater weight is likely to be attached to ecological considerations.”

I do not think that anybody, including me, would dispute that a higher level of protection should be offered where a marine species is declining or threatened. The memorandum states “rare”, and I suppose that in such cases, and even to some extent in the aspect of “threatened”, we must establish what is threatening and what is causing decline. We need to be careful not to offer levels of protection that go so far that they prohibit certain types of activities that are perhaps not threatening or causing the decline of a species in a marine conservation zone.

Although I appreciate that in certain circumstances ecological considerations should be given greater weight, there may be circumstances in which there are issues about a particular species. However, whatever restrictions are put in place as a result of having a marine conservation zone should not be disproportionate. I think back to our debate and the ongoing discussion about the horse mussel community in Strangford lough. The Minister knows that my view is that some of the restrictions that we are being forced to put in place — they are not necessarily what we desire — are not proportionate. Particularly on the leisure front, there is consensus that the restriction on those leisure pursuits has not had any effect on the horse mussel community. Yet we are in the position of having that forced on us. We do not want to get into a situation with the Bill in which we are overzealous and start to restrict certain types of activities in an area when there is no proof that they are causing decline or threatening the marine species.

I talked about the size of conservation zones being overzealous. Look at what England has done: it designated 37,000 square kilometres of sea as marine conservation zones, which is about a quarter of its entire waters. There are concerns that that has an impact, particularly on those engaged in industry, principally fishing but others as well. It is important that the Minister, perhaps in his summing up, offers further clarity on how such zones will be designed and what industry and recreation will or, more to the point, will not be permitted.

Clause 14 concerns “consultation before designation”. However, it is imperative that consultation is meaningful. We all have experience of, and have become fatigued by, consultation with a preordained outcome. It is important that we seek to do this right and that we map out those zones through properly consulting many of the people about whom we have been talking: those in the fishing, energy or whatever industry. They perhaps know as much as the Department or its officials about what goes on. There is a need to marry all of those individuals, stakeholders and actors.

In looking into the Bill and at experience elsewhere, I am mindful that a certain Mr Attwood said something that I agree with, and that is not perhaps frequently the case. However, in these circumstances, I refer not to the Minister, but to Professor Attwood from South Africa. I do not know whether he is any relation, but he spoke sense, so I was not sure whether he was any relation —

Mr Weir: No connection whatsoever.

Mr Hamilton: Obviously, no connection. Professor Attwood said:

“Community and industry involvement in the establishment process is essential for the effective functioning”

of such zones. That is absolutely right, and I do not think that anybody would disagree with that type of approach.

Obviously, other Departments would also be involved: DARD with fishing, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) with energy and perhaps the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) with matters of leisure and recreation. I welcome the assurances that the Minister has already offered in clause 40 on electricity generation. The Minister has spoken frequently and did so again in the debate of the huge potential for offshore renewables in and around Northern Ireland. I accept, agree and think that it is only right that the administrative process is not duplicated and that we do not have two environmental impact assessments. However, that is only part of the issue. In trying to protect our marine environment, we should not step over a line and inhibit or perhaps prohibit the ability to develop that huge renewable potential.

There can be a competing tension between the two, and it often comes down to a matter of balance. However, we are on the cusp of something truly huge in Northern Ireland with our renewable energy potential and the ability not only to develop our own energy sources but to develop the technology accompanying that. The Minister referenced Marine Current Turbines and its successful project in Strangford lough at SeaGen. Given how advanced that technology is, it is not insignificant that German engineering company Siemens, one of the biggest companies in the world, has now bought a minority stake in that company. Siemens sees the huge potential of the technology, which was, as the Minister said, born in Strangford lough. In developing the protections in the Bill, we need to be careful that we do not overstep the mark and inhibit or prohibit the development of some of the technology and energy potential.

At a constituency level, I am concerned, as, I am sure, are other Members, that we are mapping and zoning out so much of Northern Ireland’s territorial waters that it will have an impact on our fishing industry. Anybody who knows

anything about the fishing industry knows that it is already hard-pressed, on its knees and feels constantly burdened by government regulation and legislation, either from Europe, Westminster or Stormont. If we map out areas at the levels that they undertook in England, whereby one quarter of its waters was zoned out, that would be a sizeable chunk of the Northern Ireland shoreline. Too high a protection level could have a negative impact on our fishing industry. We are trying to sustain the industry as best we can not only because of employment benefits for communities but because of the produce that is caught and our ability to sell it around the world. It is important that we do not overstep the mark and threaten the industry, which is, as I said, already in a desperate state.

DCAL's leisure and recreation policy must also be considered. Many people are attracted to Northern Ireland because of its leisure activities. They come to our shores to avail themselves of our fantastic facilities, and we need to be careful that, in zoning out certain areas, we are not restricting that type of activity.

There are different levels of protection, but there is always a concern that the default position can sometimes be a little too high in the level of protection that is offered. Consultation with stakeholders is important — from the energy industry, the fishing industry or the community through leisure and recreation activities, sailing clubs, and so on. All stakeholders involved in the process need to be brought together to ensure that any consultation is meaningful and considers wider factors so that we have the balance to which the Minister and I previously referred, and we do not simply go in one direction.

The Minister and the Chair of the Environment Committee referenced their personal desire for the creation of a marine management organisation. Colleagues and I remain unconvinced, to put it mildly, about that. That is not simply to do with setting up another quango — although that argument could be made — and the associated costs, particularly at a time when finances are obviously tight. There is a more fundamental philosophical point about concerns over a loss of power and democratic control. Some people argue for the creation of an MMO that would be independent of government; it would sit outside government, and none of us in this place would have control over it. That is an exceptionally dangerous direction for us to travel. For many years, many of us have strived for devolution and to get power back into our own hands, and we do not want that being given up and given out to people who have no electoral mandate at all. Perhaps such people do not always have the same perspective and balanced view as many of us have. People can talk about the creation of such organisations and setting them up with government, but if they then start to take a position —

Mr McMullan: I thank the Member for giving way. I share his concerns about zone management. Does he agree that the Bill has exemptions and exceptions to keep people who may be outside the law in line?

1.30 pm

Mr Hamilton: I agree. I accept the Member's point that there are restrictions in the Bill. The point that I am making is about the bit that is not in the Bill at all, which is the desire of the Minister, the Chair of the Committee and, perhaps, other

Members to see a single organisation to manage the marine environment in Northern Ireland. I am raising doubts about that.

They have offered their support for such an idea, but I am not so sure about it. I fear that the risk of our being over-zealous, with the legislation even as it stands, is greater if you set up a marine management organisation to do that work for us. The Bill is littered with references to the Department doing this, that and the other. I am happy for the Department of the Environment to do that work. I am happy for even this Minister of the Environment to do that work because he has shown, in recent weeks, a willingness sometimes to step away from officials' advice on environmental grounds and to take decisions in the wider interest of the people of Northern Ireland.

It is much better at all times, except in a few circumstances, to have democratic political control of such matters. The point that the Chair of the Committee made is right: we should be legislating for what we can all agree on, and this Bill is something that we can all agree on. If there is an argument for a marine management organisation to be set up, we will look at what happens in practice with this legislation.

At this stage, however, many of us remain unconvinced of the need for a marine management organisation and, therefore, do not support it. I am glad to see that the Bill has come forward without the inclusion of such a structure. Therefore, I can support the Bill as it is. We should look at the Bill in practice, see what happens, and perhaps look at it at a later stage. However, it will be a difficult argument to make, not least to go back to the first point about whether we need another quango, with all the associated costs and accoutrements.

I support the Bill and look forward to seeing it come through the Committee over the next number of weeks. We will become very knowledgeable about all the clauses. I support the Bill and encourage others to do likewise.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom fáilte a chur roimh an Bhille seo. I welcome the Bill and support its broad principles. I hope that it is about can-do rather than must-do. We are under a lot of European directives. However, if we are to bring forward legislation to the Floor of the House, it should be about something that we can achieve and have the resources to achieve.

This is a good opportunity for us to put legislation in place, but I hope that it is not like every other piece of legislation or planning — about economic benefits versus environmental concerns. It should be across the board; it should be addressed in that way.

I welcome the introduction of a statement of participation. I hope that the Minister will take the lead on that because as with any other piece of legislation that we brought forward, although we went to consultation, there have to be questions about whether that consultative process was right and of benefit. I hope that it would be about participation and, hopefully, we will come to a general agreement on a good piece of legislation. The Environment Committee should be well versed now in dealing with legislation, as we dealt with several pieces in the last mandate.

Although I look forward to the Committee Stage, the devil is in the detail. Obviously, I want clarification on a few of the Minister's points. The point was brought up about governance and marine governance. How will that be structured and how will it oversee the marine plan and the overall future direction of our local seas?

The Bill indicates that there will be no marine management organisation. I believe that the marine plan will be managed by an intergovernmental group. In the absence of a marine management organisation, will the Minister indicate how he proposes to work with local authorities, local groups, NGOs and people who, I hope, take from today the message that it is about participation, not just consultation? What credence will be given to their contribution and what opportunity will be given to them? The Minister indicated that he met a stakeholder group; I hope that credence will be given to those people's contributions.

In respect of marine conservation zones, I would like to know about participation and about data collection and work that has already been done. The Minister touched on that but how does he propose to go about that? The Member who spoke previously talked about designations. If we are looking at proper designations, we need proper information, and we need to be well informed to make those decisions. Outside bodies may have relevant data. Are you going to look at the information and the good work that those bodies have already gathered or is it all about the work of Departments and the information that they have gathered?

Existing legislation and regulations have been mentioned, such as the marine strategy framework directive, good environmental status and the wild birds directive, which was mentioned by the Committee Chairperson. How will the Bill marry those and achieve the standards set out in the regulations? How will it address the concerns of people who feel that the Bill may not go far enough in that respect?

You also talked about resources and you mentioned costs. Will the cost of those resources be met centrally or are you going to work with the local authority? Who is going to pay for all that?

We have been given some dates for implementation, but I have experience of legislation that has come through the House before. The Minister indicated that it would be 2014, so will he assure the House that when the Bill receives Royal Assent, it will be fully operational and the resources will be there? I know that there will be a roll-out of subsequent legislation. Therefore, we need to have the primary legislation in place to know exactly what we are going to introduce. We have experienced a number of problems with secondary legislation. We have gone out to consultation on secondary legislation on a number of occasions, and it has held up the process. If we bring this piece of legislation through the Committee and the Assembly, I would appreciate it if that did not happen in this case.

I look forward to the Bill being passed. It is a smaller Bill, with 48 clauses. Given that we managed the Planning Bill in the previous mandate, I think that we can manage this Bill reasonably well. However, I ask the Minister to encourage the stakeholders and the people with an interest in this legislation to participate properly so that we get an opportunity to scrutinise the Bill properly. With that in mind, I support the broad principles of the Bill.

Mr Kinahan: This is a great day for Northern Ireland, and not just in relation to golf and snooker. We have a phenomenally important Bill coming through the House, which, hopefully, will manage our seas better and look after the resources that are there.

I welcome the Bill. It is essential that we have good marine planning. The Bill brings in the organisation that will organise it.

I also welcome the shared usage of conservation, energy and resources that all our fishermen and others have. Here, at last, we have a chance to welcome some form of compatibility between marine planning and terrestrial planning.

Finally, I welcome a last chance to get all the stakeholders together. One thing that we have seen continually through the Committee is that, often, stakeholders, numerous as they are, feel left out at some stage. It is vital that we pull them all together today.

I congratulate the Department and the staff for the brief, and I particularly congratulate the Minister for getting it through the Executive and here today.

As does everybody else, the Ulster Unionist Party wants to see tourism thrive. Likewise, we want to see renewable energy, the trawling industry, angling, sea fishing and all those marine pastimes and businesses thriving. We want to see the minerals thriving, but we want to see the environment survive as well as thrive. That is why I feel that today is a great day.

There are some concerns. The first, which many of you touched on, is the lack of a marine management organisation. Yes, we have an intergovernmental group that will pull it all together, but when you read through the legislation, it seems that it does not have a lot of power or the teeth necessary to take us to where we need to go. It may be interesting to note that the previous Committee wanted a marine management organisation. However, we are into a new Committee and a new Assembly. I am also concerned that there does not seem to be a formal independent advisory committee that can bring forward, with no political leaning, what it feels is happening on the maritime side on the seas and on the seabed. There also seems to be a lack of timescales and frameworks against which to enforce matters. One of the biggest problems of all is that we do not seem to have a good view of the cost or resources that are needed to put it all in place. We know that there is a carrier bag levy in a very tight budget, but we do not have much vision of anything else. It concerns me that this legislation is going to be a lawyer's dream.

I will take you back to there being no management organisation. Consider that we have to pull together five Departments: the Department for Regional Development has the ports, water, sewerage; the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure has fishing, licensing and sports; the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has tourism and the business side; the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has the fisheries; and the Department of the Environment has responsibility for this Bill, pollution and all other matters that come on board. Those are the five key Departments, yet all the others will have some part of it as well.

We have got to follow international and EU law. We also have to link ourselves into the United Kingdom — to England, Scotland and Wales — and we must fit what we are doing to

Ireland. Furthermore, we must include the councils at every stage. We need a strong body that can pull all that together. We also need that body to have the knowledge. It must have knowledge of flora and fauna and relationships with the tides and the seas. We must also have a full understanding of how it links to the rivers, the loughs, the fresh water areas and the sea water areas. I wonder why it does not include Foyle and Carlingford loughs.

We must also have a body with the skills for business and an ability to understand the livelihoods that go on on the sea, and we must ensure that we do not damage those. Of course, we must balance that with knowledge of the energy that we can get from our seas, whether it is wind, wave power or others. So, we need a body, preferably an independent body, that has that knowledge.

When I was a councillor in Antrim, we had the Lough Neagh Advisory Committee, which had specialists from all corners. We learned about gravel extraction, balanced against eel fishing, jet skis and birdwatching. I could go on. That was a perfect example of an advisory committee, with academia, sporting knowledge and business all in the one place. That is the sort of body that we need to ensure is put in place somewhere with this legislation.

What went wrong in previous debates on river pollution is that we struggled to get the four Departments to pull together, so what will it be like when we try to pull together cross-national bodies as well? We need to have an organisation, whether for marine management, which we would favour, or another strong departmental body. It must have teeth so that it can deal with issues within certain timescales.

1.45 pm

As we all know, when we raise questions at Committee, we often get half answers and have to ask another question or delays mean that it takes months to get an answer or a briefing. Adding all the different bodies involved to that equation would result in something that is cumbersome and slow, and I hope that we do not put in place an organisation like that. It is our job as Assembly Members to try to put in place a dynamic and efficient organisation. That is why I feel that we need an advisory committee.

As I said, there are few timescales and few frameworks. We need some timescales for enforcements. We need a review system. The Bill specifies reviews every three and six years, and I welcome that. However, how will that review system apply? It concerns me that, once or twice in the past, petitions of concern were used as a way of blocking environmental work rather than for their intended purpose of protecting against sectarianism.

We know very little of how much everything will cost. We know that the sea is warming, but we need specialists to tell us by how much and what will happen in the future. We need specialists to tell us about fish stocks, whether of sea bass, lobster or shrimps. We know that jellyfish have swarmed once or twice and that starfish are taking over Strangford lough. Today, we hear that there are 25 newly identified types of sponge. There is so much that we do not know that we need specialists to educate us, but the cost of that information concerns me. We must know the global effects, and we need specialists to help us there, too. We all know that two scientists will probably give two different points of

view. We must, therefore, have some form of independent advice. That is very likely to cost us, and it could be a bottomless pit.

I want to touch on one or two other matters. I have concerns about councils' aversion to taking risks. We need councils to be part of the new body. However, they will not have specialists to advise them. In dealing with terrestrial planning, they will need advice, help and resources. It concerns me that the document asks for public authorities to take action that "best furthers" or "least hinders" conservation. The phrase "least hinders" bothers me, because there lies a way of doing the minimum. We saw that in Strangford lough when there was no contact between us and Europe for four years. We did very little, and it looks as though we may pay for that.

Clause 7 mentions the reporting duty, which I touched on. I think that we should put something in the Bill to make it impossible to block environmental matters so that we can deal purely with the matters in front of us.

Clause 8 refers to challenges to the validity of marine plans being made within six weeks but gives no end date. That means that you can challenge a marine plan and it will remain challenged. We need dates to close things off. One large, wealthy energy company could delay all matters for ages.

Clause 12 states that the Department must take account of "social or economic consequences". However, when it comes to a point at which agreement cannot be reached and one Department is battling with another, the matter is likely to come before the Executive. I would like the Minister to clarify that.

When it comes to clause 13 and marine designation, I wonder how we will actually mark or designate the areas and patrol them, night and day. Again, that creates extra and higher costs.

I would like the Minister to clarify something in clause 14. Once you have published a notice of designation, the Department has 12 months to work with it. If the Department does not make a decision, it states in our brief that it must start again. That is another cost, and it seems to me to be a waste of time. Surely we must use the work that was done in that 12 months.

Mr McMullan: I thank the Member for giving way. Does the Member agree with me that when you talk about getting all the main players to sit at the table to look at the organisation and management of the Marine Bill, the one body that is left out is the actual owner of the seabed, namely the Crown Estate? You talk about some of the bigger bodies being able to keep litigation going for a long time because they can afford to do that. We need to know, once and for all, what role the Crown Estate will play in marine management.

Mr Kinahan: As I understand it, the Crown Estate is subject to all the same rules as the rest of us. If you read the Bill, you will see that it states that. I sometimes wonder whether anything that has "Crown" written in it is subject to being attacked by your party.

Clause 20 lays out the duties of public bodies. Again, we come to the issue of "best further" and "least hinder". On the back of that, you get a huge risk of legal action and the problem of bigger bodies having more money and being able to fight it.

Clauses 30 and 31 deal with fines. If you breach by-laws, the fine is up to £5,000, whereas if you do reckless damage, the fine is up to £50,000. During the previous Assembly mandate, we made £100,000 the top limit of fines for damaging historic buildings or protected trees. It concerns me that when you put figures into a Bill, they sit there for years and years. As the value of money changes, the fines become more paltry. We should have some sliding scale or look at doing it differently and have much higher levels of fines. We should ensure that the fine fits the crime, not just in respect of the money made or the legal cost but so that it acts as a punishment. We need to ensure that we get that into the Bill. If you think of all the huge European fines that we get, we should save ourselves money by having that in place.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. I agree with him about ensuring that we get a punishment that fits the crime. I point out that the reference in clause 31(4)(a) to the fine not exceeding £50,000 is one of two options. If it were felt to be a more serious case with a conviction on indictment, clause 31(4)(b) provides the opportunity to go beyond that level of fine. However, I appreciate the general point about ensuring that we have sufficient levels of fines to act as a deterrent.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Member for his intervention. I understand that, but I feel that once you put a figure in the Bill, that tends to be the limit that lawyers work around.

Part 4 deals with generating stations. It intrigues me that two different applications for permission will be looked at in parallel and at the same time. I would like the Minister to clarify that, because I can see one company blocking another and slowing it up by applying for the same permission at the same time. We have to put something in place that stops that and protects businesses.

In the schedules, we need to fit the terrestrial plans to the regional development strategy and to councils' new planning system. Yet again, we have no time frame. We need timescales or it will never work.

In respect of fixed monetary penalties, paragraph 4(2) of schedule 2 states that substantial changes must be consulted on. Again, we have this word substantial, but what does it mean? I hope that we will look at that in more detail. I can see lawyers using that word to delay matters.

The Ulster Unionist Party is very much behind the Bill. However, there are lots of issues that concern us. We long to see the Bill in place and better consideration of our environment, but not at the cost of people's livelihoods. It is one step. We feel that there needs to be some form of marine management organisation and independent advisory committee. We must get there quickly and put timescales in place. The Ulster Unionist Party supports the Bill.

Mr Dallat: We heard about the Crown, but I suspect that the half crown is the bigger issue. For those who use the decimal system, a half crown is worth 12.5p. The details of the Bill have been gone over, so I just want to generalise them in the hope of putting into perspective just how important the Bill is. Two aspects of life have always intrigued me: what is in space and what is under the water. One of the greatest motivators that I ever had the privilege of meeting was a lady called Helen Sharman. For those interested in space: she was one of the English ladies who made up the team that went to the Mir space station. Her delivery about what she saw in outer space left no one in

any doubt about the fact that there is something fascinating in space beyond what we understand. My experience of what is under the sea is very similar. Although I do not claim to be a deep sea diver, I did work for a salvage company for a couple of years, and that created an opportunity for me to go beyond the baths on William Street in Derry to see what was beneath the water in Lough Swilly. Upon reflecting on the wonders of the nature that I saw there, I would be loath to put any limits on what we need to do to protect marine life in all its forms.

With the experience of that privilege far more years ago than I am going to tell you lot, I welcome the Second Stage of the Marine Bill. I regard it as a very significant step forward in a planning process that will encourage the general public to have a better understanding of how important the issue is. I think that it is a very important part of the process in respect of informing people about the marine areas and stimulating interest in what is there and what needs to be protected. Above all, we have to generate confidence in what we are doing. Much of what I heard this afternoon has been very positive, but there have been some negatives as well.

I think that it has been said that the success of the Marine Bill is the responsibility of not just the Department of the Environment, though I accept that it has a lead role, but — I am sure that I do not need to mention them — the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Department for Regional Development, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and a whole plethora of other organisations that have been alluded to. We obviously need to continue to consult with those people and to have their support. That is central and crucial to what we intend to do.

We have to keep reminding ourselves of the 2015 deadline by which the UK and Ireland must achieve good ecological status in coastal and transitional waters out to one nautical mile, as required by the water framework directive. From recent debates in the Chamber, we know, of course, that the key element in marine planning is how to manage competing interests in the marine area.

Therefore, it is essential to ensure that all material considerations are taken into account, and we must assess the anticipated benefits and adverse affects of proposals, be they economic, social or environmental. Above all, the overall goal must be sustainable development in the marine area.

2.00 pm

I welcome the fact that the Bill provides for a designation regime that is flexible to the needs of the habitat or species requiring protection. Although the level of protection will vary, I hope that it will always err — if at all — on the side of protection rather than expose the marine environment to any unnecessary risks. I welcome the provision of designated marine nature conversation sites, which will protect nationally important marine wildlife and habitats and will be based on the use of best available scientific interest. Of course, one day I will look forward to the other. I have little experience of Strangford. I have used the ferry a few times as a tourist down to soak up the wonders and beauty of that part of Northern Ireland, but I certainly know a lot more about Lough Foyle and, as I said, Lough Swilly. In that respect, fishing and other organisations, commercial responsibilities and other socio-economic interests have

to be taken into account in the process of identifying and designating marine nature zones. As I said, there is no time to dally in the implementation of the key elements of the Marine Bill, and I am happy that Strangford is designated or planned to be the first. I am sure that others will follow.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

I made reference to fishing, and I acknowledge and take note that the zones will not be used as a fisheries management tool and will not impinge on the objectives of the common fisheries policy. I welcome the undertaking that there will be effective engagement with the key stakeholders and that all potential maritime conservation zones will be subject to full consultation and will take account of the common fisheries policy.

There are many other aspects of the Bill that I would like to refer to, but I realise that Question Time is coming shortly. It is sufficient to say that this historic legislation will benefit mankind for many years to come. As I said, the fact that it will raise public awareness of the need for such a Bill is a success in itself. It is then up to others who have the responsibility to implement and do the job.

I know that I have not been able to paint the picture of the wonders of the world beneath the waves in the same way that Helen Sharman painted a picture of space for me many years ago. However, I hope that Members will appreciate that the Bill is probably one of the most important Bills that will go through the House during this period. I encourage and support the Minister and everyone else who can help him to make this a Bill that future generations will be grateful to this packed House today for. Of course, I have been slightly facetious there, as I know that Members are at Committee meetings and so on and are equally interested and involved in making the Marine Bill a success.

Mr Weir: I do not know whether anyone in the packed Gallery was made aware that John Dallat or I would be speaking today; people have exited stage left. I will leave that to the better judgement of others. It is important that, having had a tour of space, among other things, we bring the Bill back down to earth.

When Danny Kinahan indicated his initial support for the Bill, he said that this was a great day for Northern Ireland. It was then slightly interesting that the bulk of his speech included a range of individual concerns, which, perhaps, slightly tempers the notion of how great it is. However, I agree that it is a significant Bill for Northern Ireland and one that I broadly welcome.

I will not reiterate the points that were made, particularly by Mr Kinahan and others. However, we need to take extreme care to ensure that all the details are correct. I think that it was Mr Boylan who referred to the devil being in the detail. I am reminded of Mr Nesbitt, a Member in a previous mandate, who often said that salvation was in the small print. Whether we take the more pessimistic or optimistic view, it is undoubtedly the case that we need to drill down into many aspects of the Bill and ensure that they are correct.

It is important that we put everything in place to protect our marine environment. All my life, I have lived close to the coast in Northern Ireland. As one who grew up close to Ballyholme beach, I know that we must have proper and, as Mr Hamilton said, balanced protection. That should unite the House.

The Bill is significant in the direction that it takes things and how it scopes things out. Much of the Bill will act as an enabler for crucial actions in the future. As mentioned, the marine planning provisions in the Bill are important, and the implementation of the statement of public participation will also be highly significant. It is vital that what seems to be a good way of encapsulating the wide range of interests and allowing those voices to be heard is followed through in practice. Leadership from the Department is important, and we have seen examples in which the lack of a joined-up approach has had to be corrected. That is particularly the case with Strangford lough, where a more integrated approach at an earlier stage could have paid dividends and not left us in the current situation. Having a statement of public participation — meaning genuine participation and consultation — will be vital.

In looking at the Bill, we are not operating on a blank sheet, as work has been ongoing throughout the UK. It is important that we ensure that what is put in place meets the specific needs of Northern Ireland, but we must not try to reinvent the wheel or disjoin ourselves from the rest of the United Kingdom. There are good things that we can work on with colleagues in other jurisdictions. We should always seek to give the maximum protection to our marine environment.

The Minister referred to the marine conservation zones. He mentioned that there will not be a one-size-fits-all approach, and that is important. Different levels of protection are needed, and flexibility must apply. As my colleague highlighted, we also need to critically examine the activities that can take place. At times, as a reaction to the protection of certain zones, activities have been banned that, from a practical point of view, do not in any way harm the marine environment. It is important that we get the maximum buy-in.

The first of my final two points is on the issue of having an MMO. The Chair of the Committee touched on the notion that the best way to move forward is through a Bill with the greatest consensus. I suspect that the House will come back to the issue of having an MMO, and it is important that we do not get the two issues muddled up. Some of us on this side of the House would, at best, have reservations about the need for an MMO, and we are not convinced by the argument for it. I appreciate what has been said about the complexities of the organisations that will be involved, but I do not think that we should simply create a separate, stand-alone body. Indeed, in many ways, handling those issues is what the lead Department is for, and we should not set up another potentially costly quango. In the week that we buried Frank Carson, the Minister's catchphrase is about those who know the difference between being in government and being in power. Obviously, I have slightly misquoted him, but that is an oft trotted-out phrase of the Minister. It is important that, when decisions are taken, the Ministers who take them are ultimately answerable to the House. Therefore, I have a degree of reservation that, whatever structures we put in place, we do not simply have something that is at arm's-length and is not properly accountable to the Assembly.

On occasions, Ministers have to take decisions that will not necessarily get consensus. A good example of that, on which I would support him publicly and privately, was the Minister's recent decision about the golf course in north Antrim. He weighed up the various interests and came to what I believe was quite a sensible solution. However, I am also aware that that opinion would not be universally

shared. If that decision were simply left to an outside quango, the ability of any Minister to take a rounded view on what is good for the community as a whole may disappear. Consequently, it is important that Ministers who take decisions are held accountable for them and we do not look to simply shove difficult decisions to an arm's-length body, where, if we do not like the result, we can shrug our shoulders and say that the decision was out of our hands. That is an important issue.

I suspect that, in the passage of the Bill, a wide range of issues will be raised, as Mr Kinahan pointed out. If we can concentrate on getting those details right, we will have done probably several weeks of good work. As one of the veterans of the Committee for the Environment, along with Mr Kinahan, Mr Boylan and others, I am glad that the Bill seems to be a reasonably manageable size. Given the amount of detail on which we will need to drill down, I suspect that a considerable amount of scrutiny will still be required, but the Committee has a reputation for dealing with fairly large pieces of legislation in the past, and it is important that that is done.

I will be interested to hear clarification from the Minister on a point that I raised in Committee, to which, at this stage, there appears to be no particular answer. It is important, whether it is in the Minister's remarks today or relatively soon, that we start to get ballpark figures for the Bill's price tag. That is important for two reasons. First, it is crucial that any piece of legislation, particularly one as significant as the Marine Bill, can be supported or rejected on the basis of having our eyes open about the costs. That is a vital component of the process. Secondly, one of the major problems that we have found is not so much the passing of the legislation but its effectiveness and its implementation. The Committee for the Environment has, at times, been presented with good legislation that has gone through but been followed by complaints from lobby groups or interest groups in a particular field that support has not been given for implementation and that the money is not there and nor are the officials. It is important that we get a handle on the full cost of the implementation of the Bill, so that we can ensure that there is a commitment to deliver on it. Consequently, I await the Minister's response on that. None of us will want him to simply pluck a figure out of the air, but it is important that, as the debate moves on, we get a clear indication of the cost of implementing the Bill, so that we can proceed with our eyes open.

I look forward, with others, to drilling down into the detail of the Bill to ensure that we get something that is fit for purpose for Northern Ireland, serves our entire community and ensures that the habitats in our maritime zones are properly protected in a balanced way. I support the motion.

2.15 pm

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I wish to speak in favour of the Marine Bill. The Bill's context and framework allow us to produce information and data on the many uses of our marine environment and, in turn, the best use of what is a great asset. I come from a coastal community and constituency, and I am very aware of the precious nature of our marine environment. It is precious not only for habitat but for the commercial fisheries in Kilkeel, Ardglass and Portavogie, where people make their living out of the marine environment both on the sea and the land.

When we discuss conservation zones, we have to bear it in mind that people require to make a living from the sea.

Marine planning makes sense and is long overdue, and it is important that the Department of the Environment consults the other Departments that have responsibilities for fisheries: DARD, DETI, DRD and DCAL. I like that joined-up approach. Too often, there is a great frustration among the general public when they do not see Departments working together, so it is refreshing and very welcome. My colleagues talked about Strangford lough, and a lesson has to be and has been learned about Departments working together much more closely instead of operating in silos. If Departments had worked together, we would not be in the situation where we may face infraction fines over the modiolus modiolus issue on Strangford lough. That points out to us that we need to work together, and marine planning gives us that opportunity.

There are a number of conflicts regarding the different sectors. I talked about the fishing sector, and there are mineral sites where gravel and sand extraction takes place and water-based tourism. The Minister touched on the fact that there is great potential to create many hundreds, if not thousands, of jobs in activity tourism and renewable energy. On the island of Ireland in general, we want to be known for the green, clean image that the Minister articulated earlier.

Many Members touched on resources. We need a clear figure. The Minister talked about £2 million over three or four years, but there is also the issue of resources for local authorities to carry out their enforcement duties. We need to get some idea about what resources will be made available. As was said earlier, a figure for that cannot be plucked out of the sky, but we might get into that type of detail in Committee.

Climate change and rising sea levels is a big issue, and that must be factored into our marine plan. Coastal erosion is also a big issue. Danny Kinahan said that new species were coming to our waters. Our marine environment is ever-changing, and that is probably also linked to climate change.

Without going on too much longer, I welcome the opportunity to work on the Marine Bill, at least for three weeks, before I finish in this arena. It will be an exciting Bill, and we want really good legislation. We want to work with the Department and the Minister to get that good legislation, and our communities deserve that. We have waited a long time for it, so we want to get it right.

Mr Nesbitt: I support the Bill. It strikes me that it is an ambitious Bill, as, indeed, it should be. We are trying to do on sea what we have tried but spectacularly failed to do on land, which is to bring together a variety of strands of government. Back in my days as a journalist at UTV, I became very excited by the prospect of the Belfast metropolitan area plan (BMAP) only to find that my excitement was, to say the least, a little premature.

I wish the Minister well as he attempts to co-ordinate no fewer than five of our devolved Departments: Environment; Agriculture and Rural Development; Culture, Arts and Leisure; Enterprise, Trade and Investment; and Regional Development. For me, it illustrates the nature of how we do government in this country. We often describe it as government working in silos, which are, of course, vertical, and the Minister is trying to introduce a horizontal element, bringing all matters marine across a variety of government

Departments and being cognisant of the need to link in with what is happening in the Republic of Ireland, England, Scotland, Wales and the European Union.

In assessing the legislation, I ask myself, "Does it paint a picture of what success looks like?". I accept that the three aims of marine planning, conservation and licensing for electricity-related projects are clear, but, for me, it does not exactly paint a picture or, if it does, it is a sketch rather than a full-blown oil painting. For example, Strangford lough, which the Minister referred to many times, is, of course, at the centre of my constituency. It is, as the Minister said, the most protected marine environment that you could hope to find. However, what would success look like on foot of the introduction of this Bill? For me, it would mean that Strangford lough was protected, productive and well promoted.

I noted, when we were talking about golf, that the Minister referred to going to Shandon Park to watch Christy O'Connor Snr. Indeed, I did that many years ago, and, to borrow an advertising phrase from those days, I would like Strangford lough to be promoted as somewhere where you could "Work, rest and play". It should be vibrant, varied in its usage and properly valued. How do we achieve that? I note that we took some steps 10 years ago to protect the modiolus modiolus, yet we have not revived and revitalised that biogenic reef and are still engaged in arguments over the validity of scientific research. For me, that illustrates the challenge facing the Minister and his Department. Somebody will commission scientific research; that will lead to a report; the report will end with recommendations; and recommendations will lead to actions such as, for example, a ban on dragnet fishing. However, the fishermen will not accept that science as impartial and objective evidence, and they will then commission their own research, which will lead to reports and end with recommendations and, perhaps, counteractions. So, the question is this: will the implementation of this legislation be conducted in a manner that will allow all interests to buy into the planning, the conservation and the licensing of electricity-related projects?

As the Minister knows, an electricity-related project is under way on Strangford lough. SeaGen, a world leader in tidal generation renewables, is generating more electricity than was at first thought, with no identified downside by way of environmental impact. That is all being done in the most protected marine environment that you can find, yet it is successful. In other words, have we not helped the marketing drive for those who are developing these new renewable technologies? If we are developing an international reputation in this area, if the world of renewable energy has half an eye on what is happening in Strangford lough and if the world is, as it is, seeking alternatives to fossil fuel, here we have economic potential, economic opportunity and an economic challenge to grasp the opportunity to create a renewables corridor and to become a UK centre of excellence for renewables and their development. I have called before for such a corridor, starting at Belfast harbour, where £50 million has been invested in the logistics facility for DONG of Denmark, which will develop the offshore wind farms in the Irish Sea. The South Eastern Regional College is developing an expertise in environmental studies, and the fleet in Portavogie could be revitalised to service the supply chain. This is all about economic regeneration and opportunity. My question is this: will the Bill max out the potential to develop those economic

regeneration opportunities? Will the legislation help or hinder that? Will it enable it or will it emasculate it?

We should look to develop seabed tidal energy as the most reliable and predictable of our renewable energy sources. I hope that the Bill will allow that to happen not only in Strangford lough but around our shores. I therefore urge the Minister to reassure the House that nothing in the legislation will mitigate our ability to max out the potential for developing renewable energies and establishing ourselves as an area that is regarded as a UK centre of excellence.

I hope that we avoid repeating what we seem to have done to the fishing fleet, members of which perceive there to be one-way traffic when it comes to legislation — always out to bash them, to hinder them, to impede them and to take away their right to earn a living, always over what they believe to be contested science. I understand that the Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership is consulting on the future of the lough, hoping to achieve buy-in from all — a microcosm, perhaps, of what the Minister is attempting to do.

Finally, I will say a word on implementation. I know that my colleague mentioned his concerns about a marine management agency. This party says no to further quangos and no to further NDPBs. Five Departments are involved. We must look at that under the overall review of the number of Departments, MLAs and the rest in the coming months. What we need is a lead Department with legal responsibility. If we are to go further and look at an NDPB, my party would need to be convinced, and, to convince us, we would have to adopt a policy such as a policy of two out for every new one in.

I hope that, as the legislation develops, the Minister will lead the drive to paint a picture of why the legislation will be good news for those with an interest in Strangford lough, our inshore waters and all that the legislation is designed to cover.

Mr Speaker: As Question Time begins at 2.30 pm, I ask that the House takes its ease until that time. The debate will continue after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Patsy McGlone.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Victims and Survivors Service

1. **Mr McCallister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the board members of the new Victims and Survivors Service will be appointed. (AQO 1446/11-15)

Mr P Robinson (The First Minister): We are on schedule to establish the new Victims and Survivors Service by 2 April. We are committed to ensuring that it is established in a manner that will provide for and support people's needs. The formation and make-up of the board will be an integral part of the new service, and it is important that we ensure that we have the best possible people in position. We have agreed that, in addition to a chair, there should be four board members. The Victims and Survivors Service falls outside the statutory remit of the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland. However, we intend to ensure that the spirit of the commissioner's code of practice is applied to this appointment. The service is a delivery body; its focus will be on delivery, effectiveness and corporate governance. The chair and board members will be committed to ensuring that the Victims and Survivors Service is capable of providing support for all victims and survivors of the Northern Ireland conflict in a sensitive, co-ordinated, outcome-focused and efficient manner.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the First Minister for that reply. In reflecting on his answer and the need for this to happen in a sensitive and co-ordinated manner, I want to know how he will ensure that measures are put in place so that no former terrorists can sit on the board.

Mr P Robinson: Membership of the board will be a joint decision for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). That is my way of ensuring that.

Mr Campbell: The First Minister has outlined the structures. Will he clarify how he expects those who will work within the structures to liaise, co-operate and work with others in the victims' sector?

Mr P Robinson: Any time of transition can cause confusion about how a system will operate. Essentially, there are three strands. The first is advice. At present, we have three victims' commissioners. We will look at that issue on the basis of the KPMG report and determine whether that is the appropriate number. I think that the deputy First Minister and I have a view on that. The commissioners are to be informed by a victims' forum, which will have a direct relationship with stakeholders. The second strand is policy determination. We have a victims' unit in OFMDFM, made up of officials; they will take the advice that they get from the commissioners and move the policy on as a consequence. The third strand is delivery: what the new service will do. It will be overseen by a board and assisted by assessors, who will look at the individual needs of victims and those of groups.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Céard a dhéanfaidh an tseirbhís seo. What functions will the new service have?

Mr P Robinson: I could give a very long answer to that, but the key component is that it is setting the operational strategic direction for the organisation in the commissioning of services to meet the individual needs of victims and survivors. It will also be responsible for decisions on procurement issues. Moreover, it will ensure that the general guidelines laid down by OFMDFM are fully adhered to and that the service operates within the limits of its strategic and operational plans. It will also ensure that the service complies with any statutory or administrative requirement for the use of public funds. In addition, it will ensure that business is carried out in accordance with the code of conduct and will be directly responsible for monitoring and directing the chief executive and his or her staff.

Mr Eastwood: Will the First Minister and the deputy First Minister press the Secretary of State to ensure that the Irish Government are invited to play a central role in creating a comprehensive mechanism for dealing with the past?

Mr P Robinson: We have had discussions already with the Secretary of State at a party level. I am sure that the Member and his colleagues have already put that view to the Secretary of State. Dealing with the past is as important as it is sensitive. Unfortunately, there is not a universally agreed way forward in that respect. Each of the parties will have some difference, at least on nuance, as to how it should be dealt with, but I think that all of us recognise that we have to remember that there are people who are still suffering very much as a result of a long campaign of terrorism in Northern Ireland. We have to be aware of their desire to have not just the truth told but justice.

Foreign Direct Investment

2. **Mr Ross** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on their efforts to attract foreign direct investment. (AQO 1447/11-15)

6. **Mr T Clarke** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans they have for 2012-13 to attract inward investment. (AQO 1451/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will answer questions 2 and 6 together.

In support of the economy Minister, the deputy First Minister and I will participate in a number of visit programmes in the coming months, including to North America, India, Dubai and even China. Inward investment plays an important role in growing the Northern Ireland economy. We welcome the opportunity to support Invest Northern Ireland's activities in overseas markets. Our first overseas visit of the year will be to North America, where we will meet a number of potential and existing investors and key business influencers in Washington DC and Canada. North America is, of course, a significant source of foreign direct investment (FDI), and we will take the opportunity to reinforce the message that we have a superb track record in assisting inward investors to grow and thrive in Northern Ireland. We will also share that message with the highest levels of the Obama Administration. We are scheduled to meet President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton around the St Patrick's Day celebrations.

We also plan to lead an Invest Northern Ireland trade and investment mission that is scheduled to visit India and the United Arab Emirates in April. The visit will be part of Invest Northern Ireland's Opportunity India campaign and is the first mission to visit the market in 2012. Indian companies are major investors in the United Kingdom and a growing source of FDI for European countries. Again, we will communicate the message that the Northern Ireland Executive are pro-business and committed to growing the economy. We will continue to look for opportunities to support the economy Minister and Invest Northern Ireland in the effort to attract quality inward investment.

Mr Ross: I am sure that the First Minister agrees that Northern Ireland is punching above its weight in attracting inward investment. He mentioned the forthcoming trip to the United States. Will he highlight some of the successes that our Ministers have had in the United States? Does he believe that there are opportunities elsewhere, particularly if we are successful in our ongoing negotiations about corporation tax?

Mr P Robinson: The deputy First Minister and I, on every occasion that we have gone to the United States, have met potential corporate clients of Invest Northern Ireland, and, on every occasion, we have succeeded in being able to bring jobs back to Northern Ireland. I hope that that pattern continues. The United States has been a very supportive market for Northern Ireland. Indeed, if you look at the Invest Northern Ireland figures, you will see that, over the past four years, there has been more investment from North America than any other part of the world. It is a very important market for us, but we have to recognise that China is the second largest economy in the world — some say that it may well be the largest economy before very long — and that India is a growing and thriving economy as well. It is important that we get into those markets. It is always much more difficult to get into markets where there is a greater difference in culture, but, already, Invest Northern Ireland has been involved in India and is at the early stage of involvement in China. We hope to assist its operations in both of those places.

Mr T Clarke: Will the First Minister join me in congratulating the successes of Rory McIlroy and Mark Allen over the weekend? They have brought success to Northern Ireland. Does the First Minister believe that that sporting success can lead to foreign direct investment for Northern Ireland?

Mr P Robinson: So much of investment is about how people feel about a location, and if people feel that this place is disposed to be friendly and has many of the attributes that they look for in their own lifestyles, you will find just how welcoming it is to potential investors.

The deputy First Minister and I, and I am sure the economy Minister as well, have had few engagements with business people without a golfing input in the surrounding social chit-chat. I am delighted that Rory McIlroy has achieved his lifetime ambition of becoming the planet's number one golfer, which it seems strange to talk about when he announced it when he was 10 and achieved it at 22, following his victory in the Honda Classic in Florida. Everyone is very proud of his achievements, and his success is well merited.

I also place on record my congratulations to Mark Allen from Antrim on winning snooker's World Open title in China. That was his first ranking tournament victory. I hope that it is the first of many.

Invest Northern Ireland plans to be involved in a range of golf-related activities to promote investment in Northern Ireland. For a third year, Invest Northern Ireland will be involved in corporate hospitality at the US Open, which will be held in San Francisco. That corporate hospitality will be on each of the four days of the competition. Beyond the US Open, Invest Northern Ireland is advertising on the www.pgatour.com website this week. Indeed, I hear from our colleagues at Tourism Ireland that it has produced a new 60-second commercial featuring Rory McIlroy, which will air on the Golf Channel this week. It has that excellent commercial line from Rory who says how much he loves being from Northern Ireland. All of that helps the image of the Province as far as international investors and tourists are concerned.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the First Minister update us on the devolution of air passenger duty (APD) and how that may impact on investment?

Mr P Robinson: That is another example of our successful visits to the United States. We were visiting Chicago when it became clear that Continental Airlines would move out of their Northern Ireland operation because of the APD burden. The deputy First Minister and I met Jeff Smisek, the chief executive of United Continental. We followed that up with discussions with the Secretary of State, the Minister of State and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, from whom we eventually got agreement that he would devolve APD to Northern Ireland. The Executive indicated in the draft Programme for Government that, as soon as those powers are made available to us, we will zero rate long haul flights.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the First Minister for his glowing comments on inward investment, and I welcome the increasing focus on the Middle East and Far East. Are there any plans to extend representation of the Northern Ireland Bureau-style operation to the Far East, as I think was mentioned and committed to in a previous Programme for Government? Are we yet at that stage or is it too early to think about a bureau somewhere in China?

Mr P Robinson: We already have an operation in Shanghai run by Invest Northern Ireland. Indeed, it has been looking at how to upgrade its presence in China. The deputy First Minister and I had the honour of meeting China's Vice-President, Xi Jinping, during his visit to the Irish Republic. Our meeting was kindly facilitated by the Taoiseach, and we had the opportunity to talk about the potential of a visit later this year. Invest Northern Ireland is looking at a trade mission in the autumn or winter of this year, and that is probably the best time for us to accompany that trade delegation.

2.45 pm

Barroso Task Force

3. **Mrs Dobson** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the recent progress made by the Barroso task force. (AQO 1448/11-15)

EU Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science

7. **Mr Dallat** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when they last met with Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, the Irish European Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science, who oversees an EU Commission budget of £80 billion. (AQO 1452/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will ask junior Minister Jonathan Bell, whose birthday it is today, to answer the question.

Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. With your permission —

Mr Speaker: We wish you well.

Mr Bell: Thank you very much. With your permission, I would like to take questions 3 and 7 together.

The First Minister and the deputy First Minister last met with Commissioner Máire Geoghegan-Quinn on 9 December 2010 in Brussels when they committed to a renewal of the Barroso task force. Since the presentation of the Executive's European priorities to Commissioner Hahn at the opening of the Peace Bridge in Londonderry, the cross-departmental Barroso task force working group has made significant progress. I will quote some of that progress. About £3 million has been secured in EU non-structural funds, and applications have been made for a further £33 million of assistance. The Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) has applied for joint funding of €460,000 from the Progress programme for a skills and jobs project. A DEL fund worth some £80,000 supports universities in applying for the seventh framework programme. DETI/Invest Northern Ireland have identified ways of improving Northern Ireland's business access to its successor programme, Horizon 2020. A central budget for EU secondment has delivered four new desk officers in our Brussels office. As a result of the contact with Commissioner Hahn, an official in DG regional policy is working on urban development. A full report will be provided to the Executive following the end of the financial year.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the junior Minister for his answer. I also wish him a very happy birthday. Have the UK and Republic of Ireland Governments yet made a request to the European Commission for a Peace IV programme?

Mr Bell: We have been active in progressing Peace IV. We would clearly welcome a further round of EU Peace funding. All of us are of the view that the work of peace building is not yet complete. The recession has created further challenges, particularly among young people, where unemployment is increasing, and there may be fewer opportunities for education and training. In all the meetings that the First Minister and the deputy First Minister, and also that Martina Anderson and I, have taken part in, we raised the issue of Peace IV. In pursuing the issue, we will seek to ensure that Peace IV provides additional funding to the region and does not merely replace other European Union funding sources. We have raised the issue at the joint ministerial council in Europe and also directly when we met the relevant commissioners in Europe.

Mr Dallat: Given that it is the junior Minister's birthday, and it is customary to give out pressies on such occasions, will he perhaps tell the House a bit more about the benefits that might accrue from the appointments of the four desk officers in Brussels?

Mr Bell: I appreciate the Member's good wishes. His question refers to a potential €80 billion under negotiation. As I understand it, that figure will now be €87.9 or €88 billion of a total fund. The key areas will be competitiveness

and employment and social inclusion, and work has already been undertaken. Europe is already profiling some of our work, particularly with our elderly people, innovation and technology and climate and energy. Three of the four desk officers are in post, and the fourth will arrive imminently. The Executive have set proposals for an additional 20% drawdown, so it will be in the region of an additional €64 million because we will go outside established funds to track that extra money down. Now that we have people in place in the European office, we will seek progress on those four key areas.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a chuid freagraí. Breithlá sona duit freisin. I thank the junior Minister for his answers, and join in with the happy birthdays to him.

There is an impression that, sometimes, perhaps we are not optimising the opportunities for funding from the European Union. Indeed, that can vary even from council to council. Will the junior Minister outline the comparative figure between the Executive and the Dublin Government?

Mr Bell: I thank him for the birthday wishes. Nobody has put them to me quite like that before, so thank you very much.

We must always be careful about comparing European Union funding allocations to Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Anybody looking at the detail would realise that that should be approached with caution. Obviously, Northern Ireland is a region of a member state — the UK — and its allocation of European Union funds is determined directly by internal negotiations, whereas the Republic of Ireland receives its direct allocation as an EU member state. The Republic of Ireland's economy is also structured differently to ours, and the numbers of large companies and organisations able to take part in European networking are different. Therefore, it is a comparison that needs to be approached with extreme caution.

Mr Douglas: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for giving me an opportunity to ask a question. Will the junior Minister, as I wish him a happy birthday, inform the House of any additional work that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has carried out to maximise the benefits of European engagement?

Mr Bell: The key area is looking at where there are additional opportunities to benefit Northern Ireland, particularly in relation to new funding partnerships. In October 2011, the Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels hosted a seminar on regional partnership on smart specialisation. As a direct result, DETI is in active discussions with several potential research partners, particularly looking at innovation strategy and our research and development strengths in Northern Ireland.

DEL participated in a contact seminar in Estonia in September on matching labour market and demands, which explored potential project ideas and future partnerships. DEL also established an EU framework support fund of £80,000 per annum to encourage universities to apply for funding from the framework 7 programme for research and innovation. Junior Minister Anderson and I met the European Commission in Brussels to discuss how we could contribute to and benefit from the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations 2012, particularly given the leading role of our own new Commissioner for Older People.

Our social cohesion thematic group, led by OFMDFM, will also be taking forward that work.

OFMDFM: Constitutional Convention

4. **Mr A Maginness** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether there are any plans for their Department to be involved in the forthcoming constitutional convention in the Irish Republic. (AQO 1449/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: We understand that the Irish Government have decided to establish a constitutional convention and are in the process of determining the arrangements for it. Therefore, that is a matter for the Irish Government.

Mr A Maginness: I am disappointed with the response of the First Minister. There is a unique opportunity for Northern Ireland, through the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, to have a direct input into the reshaping of the Irish constitution. I would hope that the First Minister will reconsider his answer in a positive way in order to reshape the constitution and give the people of Northern Ireland an input into doing that.

Mr P Robinson: Maybe the Member has not been following the same reports as I have, but my understanding is that the Irish Government are intent on inviting parties to make a submission. Therefore, the Member will have an opportunity, if he wants to take it up.

For my part, I want to have the best possible relationship with the Irish Republic. We have processes set up from St Andrews, which are being reviewed and will, obviously, be a matter for the Executive to determine. We clearly want to have a good relationship, but what the Irish Republic does with its constitution must be a matter, in the first instance, for the people of the Irish Republic.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the First Minister for his answer, which I warmly welcome. Rather than concerning ourselves with developments in the Irish Republic, in light of developments in Scotland, does the First Minister believe that there may be some value in considering a constitutional convention with the Scottish Government with a view to strengthening the constitution of the United Kingdom?

Mr P Robinson: One of the major constitutional differences between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom is that the Republic of Ireland has a written constitution, and, therefore, the purpose of its constitutional convention will be to determine what questions, if any, it intends to ask of the electorate in the Republic. The United Kingdom has a living constitution that breathes, grows and develops as time goes on. It changes by determination of the Houses of Parliament or by precedent over time; it has changed significantly over the years and will continue to do so.

Developments in Scotland will be a continuing area of discussion. Whether it forms part of a convention or discussions with the Government of the United Kingdom, I hope that its purpose will be to strengthen the link between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mr Speaker: Before I call Mr Allister, I warn all Members that supplementary questions should relate to the original question.

Mr Allister: The First Minister is probably aware that they have been considering a constitutional convention in

Zimbabwe. Does he agree that it would be as irrelevant for OFMDFM to consider meddling and making representations to Zimbabwe as it would be in respect of a constitutional convention in that other foreign country, the Republic of Ireland?

Mr P Robinson: I will not get into the legalese of it all, but the Member will know from the 1949 Act the standing of the Irish Republic in relation to the United Kingdom. However, it will not be my intention to meddle in anybody's constitutional affairs, other than those of the United Kingdom.

Police Ombudsman

5. **Mr Givan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the appointment process for the Police Ombudsman. (AQO 1450/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: The deputy First Minister and I have statutory responsibility for making a recommendation on the appointment of a new Police Ombudsman; we agreed arrangements for the appointment process late last year. The process is being conducted in accordance with the principles and code of practice of the Commissioner for Public Appointments and is subject to regulation by the commissioner.

The position was widely advertised in December, with a closing date for applications of 20 January. The selection phase of the process is well under way, and the appointment panel has now interviewed eligible candidates.

Mr Givan: I thank the First Minister for his response. The First Minister will know that the office has been plagued with controversy since its inception, not least on the Omagh report and other reports accusing the police of blame, which was entirely refuted. Therefore, does the First Minister agree that the individual appointed needs to be someone of the utmost integrity who will command the support of all stakeholders, including the police, in exercising their duties? What are the operating functions in that office?

Mr P Robinson: Nobody will be in any doubt about how difficult that post is for anyone to hold. Indeed, at one stage, it was even considered that someone of judicial standing might be the most appropriate person to hold it. The deputy First Minister and I refused to be involved in the process until we were given a list of people whom the panel believes to be suitable. We have been told that a large group of about 30 people wanted to be considered for the position of ombudsman. The panel interviewed about a dozen people, and we await its report.

I pay tribute to Al Hutchinson's work as Police Ombudsman and in his former role as Oversight Commissioner. In the most testing of circumstances, he has played a major role in policing in Northern Ireland, and I wish him well for the future and thank him for his contribution to Northern Ireland.

3.00 pm

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mr Speaker: Question 15 has been withdrawn and requires a written answer.

Suicide Prevention Implementation Group

1. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the suicide prevention implementation group has not met its target of reducing suicide and self-harm. (AQO 1461/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The Protect Life strategy was launched in the midst of unprecedented increases in suicide rates, which have had an almost immediate impact on the potential for achieving the 15% reduction in suicides. The reduction target is based on a three-year rolling average. Therefore, it will not be known for definite until September 2013 whether the target has been met. However, given recent trends in suicide rates, it is most unlikely that that target will be achieved. Suicide is a societal issue, and many wider social factors beyond the remit of the Protect Life strategy influence suicide levels in our communities.

The Northern Ireland Audit Office has noticed that the suicide rate alone is an unreliable indicator of health patterns and has acknowledged the difficulty of assessing the impact of Protect Life on suicide levels. In view of that, new objectives and measures are being developed. They will allow for a more balanced assessment of the impact of Protect Life, while retaining the overall goal of a reduction in suicide. Those will be set out in a refresh of the strategy, which is to be published next month.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his answer. In understanding the complexity and sensitivity of the issue, can the Minister outline whether he is confident that the measures that he has in place will ensure that the 15% reduction will be met in the coming years?

Mr Poots: Regrettably, as it appears at this moment in time, that will not be the case. There may be a range of reasons associated with that. However, actions that have been taken have been helpful and, I trust, will prove to be helpful in the work that is being done.

The Protect Life strategy was published in 2006, and the reduction target was set against a lower suicide rate recorded before 2005. There were sharp rises in local suicide rates. In fact, the rate is around double what it was six years ago. Clearly, that is a major issue that we need to tackle and address. We need to have greater connectivity across the groups, and we need to spend the resources that we have more wisely. We also need to work very closely between the statutory and voluntary sectors. The voluntary sector is a very willing community, which wants to do something about the suicide rate. We need to make best use of that willingness to ensure that we get better results.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for his answer thus far. As most of us know, alcohol and drugs can be a major contributory factor in the number of suicides. Will the Minister tell us what he is doing to address alcohol and drug misuse?

Mr Poots: I launched the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs, which is a cross-sectoral strategy to reduce the harm caused by alcohol and drug misuse. We are allocating around £8 million to its implementation each year. It seeks to direct action across five pillars: prevention and early intervention; harm reduction; treatment and support; law and criminal justice; and monitoring, evaluation and research.

We are particularly concerned about the price of alcohol. We are working very closely with Scotland and the Republic of Ireland on the issue. I am delighted to see that David Cameron has come on board and appears to be overruling Andrew Lansley in terms of bringing it in for the rest of GB. Let us hope that we can make a real impact. Around one third of people in the United States of America who took their own life were found to have alcohol in their system. It is known to be a depressant, and it has a considerable impact. Our psychiatrists indicate that there is considerable negative impact as a result of harmful consumption of alcohol.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht na bhfreagraí sin. I thank the Minister for his responses to date. What work has been carried out by the suicide prevention implementation group with students of secondary-school age? That is very valuable work.

Mr Poots: The suicide prevention group meets on an ad hoc basis, and it responds to issues that require cross-departmental action. There are representatives of the schools sector on that organisation and a fairly close working relationship has been established. We have people who go into schools to discuss suicide issues with young people and to seek to give them some guidance and direction on that. So, a considerable amount of work is being done through the cross-departmental working group and the suicide prevention implementation body.

Women's and Children's Hospitals, Belfast

2. **Mr G Kelly** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the new women's and children's hospitals at the Royal Hospitals site, Belfast. (AQO 1462/11-15)

Mr Poots: The new critical care building at the Royal hospital site is due to be completed at the end of October 2012. Following a period of clinical commissioning, it is anticipated that the building will become operational on a phased basis between May and July 2013. The top three floors of the building will house postnatal beds and maternity outpatients together with the new maternity building linked to the critical care building. That will be the new women's hospital. The new maternity building will be completed in 2014. The children's hospital will be delivered as a separate project, and as a first step in the process, I have asked the Belfast Trust to complete a strategic outline case by April 2012, which will outline the options for the delivery of this much-needed project.

Mr G Kelly: Thank you for that answer. Bearing in mind that the Belfast Trust has a proposal to make the unit in the Mater Hospital a midwifery-led one, which is looked upon in north Belfast as a downgrading of its use, will the Minister guarantee the workers there that there will be no job losses, and also guarantee the future services of the Mater as a front line hospital?

Mr Poots: A number of issues arise from that. First, it is considered that the best maternity services for the people of Belfast can be provided at the Royal Jubilee Maternity Service site, given the economies of scale in the staffing of that facility and having the appropriate people there at all times to cover the needs, because babies do not come between nine and five each day; it is a 24-hour task.

However, I have made it absolutely clear to the Belfast Trust that, in the first instance, the building needs to have the capacity to do that. I understand that that is the case. Secondly, the existing building needs to be maintained in an acceptable way until the new building is opened. That was not the case last week when we heard about the issue. I do not believe that that should happen again, and I do not reflect on it very positively. Thirdly, we must ensure that other aspects of care, not just the obstetricians, and so forth, are fit for purpose throughout the system. So, in all of what is going out to the public now, those matters need to be addressed to our satisfaction in order to move this matter forward.

Mr Humphrey: How much of a priority does the Minister consider a new regional children's hospital to be? Would he consider encouraging ministerial colleagues to support a flagship project for the Executive? Should more capital funds and resources be made available from the Executive?

Mr Poots: I should declare an interest in the children's hospital, as someone I know quite well works there. Nonetheless, I have visited the site as an individual and as Minister, and it is blatantly obvious that it is not the type of facility that we want for our regional children's hospital in the future. As I indicated, I asked for a piece of work to be done by April this year to look at identifying ways forward.

We do not have it set out in the Budget as things stand, but I believe that we must identify a way to deliver a children's hospital and to commence work on that facility, because what we have at the moment is not fit for purpose to lead us into the future. I am committed to identifying a solution for the children's hospital. There has been £8 million set aside to develop this, starting in 2014-15. However, I need £200 million, not £8 million. That will not take us anywhere. There was little point in setting that amount of money aside in the first instance.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Minister for his good news on the potential opening of the new Royal hospital site, particularly the maternity side. May I ask the Minister to comment on the bottlenecks that will still exist even after that? A couple spring to mind. First, there does not appear to be a dedicated scanner in the children's hospital. Secondly, at the mundane end, there needs to be an increase in car-parking facilities. Anytime I try to park at the Royal Victoria Hospital, it is a nightmare. Will some mechanism be put in place to ensure that the plant, with the new buildings and all the rest, is allowed to function to its fullest capacity?

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for his two questions. I will deal with the car-parking issue first. Clearly, there has been a problem at the Royal hospital for a very long time. Reviewing our health service gives us the opportunity to transfer some of the work that is done at the Royal site to some of our smaller hospitals. The Royal hospital needs to be a centre of excellence. It needs to be the centre of excellence for trauma, emergency care, emergency operations, and so forth. It does not need the site to be clogged up with people coming into clinics that could be easily conducted at other sites. The Belfast Trust has to look at how the site can be rationalised as the specialist hospital.

I am continuing to look at the issue of the MRI scanner. Obviously the issue is less about buying the scanner than the running of it. I have asked to see a copy of the business plan

to see whether we can find a way forward. Specialists are facing delay in the evidence base for children's conditions, and that should give us all concern. Therefore, we need to look very closely at addressing the issue of having a dedicated MRI scanner.

Belfast City Hospital

3. **Mr McGimpsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he can give an assurance that there are no plans to sell Belfast City Hospital. (AQO 1463/11-15)

Mr Poots: I can confirm that there are no plans to sell Belfast City Hospital.

Mr McGimpsey: What discussions, if any, concerning the Belfast City Hospital site, including the tower block, the cancer centre, the renal centre, the medical school and the blood transfusion centre, have taken place with the private sector in respect of sale and lease back, a private finance initiative, public/private partnership or any other financial arrangement with a view to raising money to address health service needs?

Mr Poots: If those discussions have taken place, I am not aware of them and have not approved them. I do not have any intention of going down that route.

Mr Dunne: Following the enforced closure of the A&E at Belfast City Hospital, how has the Royal Victoria Hospital emergency department fared in comparison to previous years? What has been the impact on the Ulster Hospital at Dundonald?

Mr Poots: There have been particular pressure points over recent weeks. Actions have been taken to deal with those in the Royal and the Ulster Hospital. Aside from the specific pressure periods, the numbers of excess waits at the Royal, the Mater and across greater Belfast have often been less than the total in previous years, when Belfast City Hospital was included in the network totals. The clinical leaders have reported the benefits of concentrating extra staff on the Royal site. They believe that they get better outcomes for patients by having the appropriate levels and skills base at the site to deal with the issues that come before them.

Mr Speaker: Order, Members. Before I call Dolores Kelly, I will say that a number of Members certainly know what they are doing. Their supplementaries do not relate to the original question in any way. Let me say — I warn all sides of the House — that, should it happen continually, Members will be asked to take their seat and I will move on. Members are obviously not heeding the warnings.

Mrs D Kelly: In relation to the waiting times for A&E admissions and the impact on the Ulster Hospital at Dundonald, does the Minister have any assessment of the impact on waiting times of the closure of A&E at the City?

3.15 pm

Mr Poots: When compared with January 2011, there was an increase in the number of new and unplanned review attendances in the individual emergency care departments in the Belfast Trust area and in the Ulster Hospital. The Royal Victoria Hospital reported the most notable increase of 1,689 attendances, which is a provisional figure. The

Ulster Hospital showed an increase of 286 attendances. So, there obviously were additional pressures. For whatever reason, additional people had to be hospitalised this year, which created problems. Sometimes, what comes out in A&E figures is not that there is a problem in A&Es but that there is a problem with capacity at the hospitals. Those issues need to be addressed by ensuring that patient flows are good, that more patients are discharged in the morning period, which will allow better flows from A&E, and so forth. All those issues are constantly being updated and reassessed.

Mr Speaker: Once again, before we move on, I want to say that I can understand why the Member went down the road that she did with her supplementary question. It was certainly in reply to the Minister's last answer. I am just clarifying that issue. Although the Minister decided to answer the supplementary question, I certainly question whether it was related to the original question. I am just warning the whole House.

Community Pharmacists

4. **Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what role community pharmacists will play in the evolving new healthcare model. (AQO 1464/11-15)

Mr Poots: The 'Transforming Your Care' proposals envisage a changing healthcare model that will move the care of patients as close to home as possible. The focus on community-based care is an opportunity for community pharmacists to strengthen their role in improving medicines management for patients, particularly those with long-term conditions; helping to minimise waste; contributing to avoiding unnecessary hospital admissions due to medicines-induced morbidity; and preventing conditions deteriorating by improving concordance. It is a model of care based not on prescription volume and product supply but on health outcomes for patients and on working as a member of the integrated primary care team. The proposals also hold an expanded role for pharmacists in the arena of health promotion in community pharmacy settings and the wider community. That should embrace a community development approach to health and well-being, for which there is good practice and evidence through the existing Building the Community-Pharmacy Partnership programme.

Given the accessibility that community pharmacy provides to the population, it is uniquely placed to support the delivery of health improvement measures, taking into account its unique opportunity to interact with patients and the public to influence health and well-being. Subject to negotiation, it is intended that a new community pharmacy contract will be put in place that will allow pharmacies to offer help to patients in a range of areas such as medicines management, smoking cessation, health screening and medication reviews in care homes, all of which are very much in line with the proactive community-based approach set out in 'Transforming Your Care'.

Mr Wells: The Minister is aware that crucial discussions took place between community pharmacists and his departmental officials on Friday. Is he in a position to outline how much progress has been made, given the apparent impasse between the two parties and the difficulties between the Department and pharmacists in recent weeks,

which, of course, have led to various court actions? Can he bring us up to date on the current situation?

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for his question. That is something that has caused me a considerable degree of angst. It happened in the previous mandate, and with the judicial review, I was not able to get involved in identifying a solution. Since early February, we have been able to get our teeth into things. I met Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland (CPNI) on 14 February, which was the earliest opportunity that we had after the final order was made in respect of the judicial review. Since then, there have been several further meetings between representatives of CPNI and my Department's permanent secretary. We are making good progress. We have had less than a month to deal with the issue, and I hope that we deal with it in less than a month.

Ms S Ramsey: I agree with the Minister that community pharmacy is an important component of healthcare. Can you state whether you are going to appeal the ruling of the judicial review? I appreciate that negotiations are ongoing and that you may not be able to go into detail.

Mr Poots: We are considering appealing the findings of the judicial review. However, it is more important to find a new and sustainable way forward for community pharmacy, and I believe that that can be achieved through dialogue and negotiation. Some of the issues relating to the judicial review would have an impact on other Departments. I am discussing those matters with the Departmental Solicitor's Office and the Attorney General to find the best response that we can make on behalf of the Northern Ireland Government. However, that does not and should not prevent us from reaching a negotiated settlement with the pharmacists on a way forward.

I see this in two spectrums. First, we need to deal with the here and now and the existing problems that pharmacists have in the service that they provide. Secondly, we need to look to the future and how pharmacists can help us with 'Transforming Your Care' in bringing care closer to home and in moving the hub of care to the home as opposed to the hospital. I believe that pharmacists have a great future and can greatly assist us in providing excellent care very close to people's homes.

Mr McCarthy: Last week, the Health Committee discussed community pharmacy, and I have a file that contains examples of how stressed and strained community pharmacy is out in the country. They have provided an excellent service for years and years. Unless and until the Minister does something immediate —

Mr Speaker: Can we have a question?

Mr McCarthy: How soon can the Minister get above what is going on at present and give the community pharmacy service that is there the confidence to carry on with the good work that it has done?

Mr Poots: I thought that I had already dealt with that question. I said that I had less than a month to get to grips with the issue, and I hope to get to grips with it in less than a month.

Mr Cree: Are there any training implications in the enhanced role for community pharmacies and how does the Minister intend to manage that?

Mr Poots: There is a huge untapped skills base of highly qualified people, and we are not making best use of them as things stand. Too much of a pharmacist's time is spent dispensing drugs. We need to change that and have pharmacists on the front line, providing a service. There is a considerable number of services that pharmacists can be involved in, and we wish to negotiate with the pharmacists how they might play that greater role and how they might help us in delivering our aim, which is to take people out of a hospital setting, as far as possible, and deal with them in a community setting. There is a considerable skills base already, and if further training is required in certain areas, we can look at that. However, we are dealing with people who are very well qualified to do considerably more than what is being asked of them or what they are allowed to do.

Carer Support

5. **Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what support his Department offers to people who care for family members. (AQO 1465/11-15)

Mr Poots: Carers are individuals with their own needs, and they need real choices, based on their circumstances. A carer's assessment is the gateway to assessing support services. My Department has introduced the regional carer's support and needs assessment tool, which facilitates the assessment of each carer and provides them with opportunities to discuss their own specific needs, allowing trusts to identify any support services that they may require. In response to assessment, a range of support can be put in place, including the provision of information and advice and putting carers in touch with support organisations or more traditional support such as respite.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he give his overall assessment as to how much he believes carers save the public purse in Northern Ireland each year? Does he believe that the current carer's allowance of £55.55 for a minimum of 35 hours, or £7.95 a day, reflects that?

Mr Poots: It is hard to put a figure on the scale of the work that carers do. I want to make it clear that if we were to ask the statutory sector to do what is being done by carers, this country would be broke; we simply could not do it without carers. Therefore, it is important that we first listen to carers. That is important in identifying the needs of individuals, as carers will know more about the circumstances and the condition of the individual and how best to treat that condition than anyone else. We should also ensure that carers are involved in care plans and are offered appropriate respite so that they are sustained and remain able to carry out the wonderful service that they provide.

Mr Irwin: What changes are expected for carers following the Compton review?

Mr Poots: 'Transforming Your Care' places a strong emphasis on improving the choice and control of care for individuals and their families. We expect to see that developed over the coming year through initiatives such as direct payments and the personalisation agenda, which will place service users and carers at the centre of their own service design and planning. We will also consult carers and patients as partners in care and increase their independence and flexibility. The Health and Social Care Board is implementing the recommendations of its report on respite care, which are

aimed at improving the consistency of approach and access to respite across Northern Ireland.

Mr P Ramsey: Minister, this morning in Parliament Buildings, there was a book launch for 'The Hidden Voices of Kinship Carers'. At that event, we heard personal stories about the dilemmas and the complexities that are faced by kinship carers when they take on siblings or nieces and nephews. Like me, will the Minister acknowledge the huge contribution that kinship carers make across Northern Ireland? Does he accept that there is a need for proactive programmes of activities that will give support to kinship carers across Northern Ireland?

Mr Poots: That was very ingenious. I was with the folks who provided the briefing this morning on kinship care. We intend to look at the adoption legislation to see how we can legislate to facilitate a greater role for kinship carers. We see that as a way forward. To be perfectly honest, I do not think that keeping children in care homes delivers the best outcomes. We need to look at other methods, and kinship care is fairly high up there in how we will respond.

Omagh Enhanced Local Hospital

6. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the services that will be provided at the new enhanced local hospital, Omagh. (AQO 1466/11-15)

Mr Poots: Phase one of the business case for the new enhanced local hospital in Omagh has been approved and will cost £80 million. It will provide the following services: an intermediate care ward and palliative care facility; an urgent care and treatment centre; a cardiac assessment facility; a day surgery unit; imaging and diagnostic services; outpatients' services; clinical investigation services; a children's centre; a women's health unit; renal services; allied health professionals in a range of disciplines; accommodation for a GP practice; a GP out-of-hours service; a health and care centre; and a range of support services, such as medical records, pharmacy and pathology.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. Is he fully aware of the success that is the cardiac assessment unit at the Tyrone County Hospital? Will he commit to developing that facility further and to providing all the necessary support for it into the future?

Mr Poots: I am well aware of the success of that service. Indeed, Donna, the nurse who leads it, was commended the year before last by the Royal College of Nursing for her leadership in taking that initiative forward. It has been such a success and has provided such a good service that our former colleague Dr Deeny, who was previously critical of things, wrote to the newspapers in support of what was happening there.

Mr Byrne: Will the Minister confirm that, as originally envisaged in the business plan, there will be a mental health facility in the new hospital? Thank you.

Mr Poots: We are looking at the provision of the mental health facility in phase two. The cost of that facility will be about £23 million, and the provision of inpatient acute mental health care and addiction services is under review by the

Health and Social Care Board. A separate business case, setting out the final proposals under phase two, will be required and is not part of this £80 million development scheme. Nonetheless, we will look at that provision in due course.

Mr Speaker: That concludes Question Time.

3.30 pm

Lord Morrow: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. We have just come through another Question Time, and I wish to raise the issue of questions that were submitted in writing but remain unanswered. Practically 90% of the questions submitted to the Department of the Environment are not answered on time. As a matter of fact, I have had a question outstanding with that Department since last September. Can you do anything at least to encourage Departments to facilitate Members in carrying out their duties as MLAs here? We do not ask questions for the sake of asking them; we ask them to ensure that we can carry out our function successfully as MLAs. Is it acceptable that one Department now runs at nearly 90% late? It will soon be that it will not answer any questions on time at all. I suspect that its next move will be to refuse point-blank to answer questions.

Mr Speaker: I thank Lord Morrow for his point of order. I am always happy that Members raise such issues in the House, including the issue of late answers to written questions. As Lord Morrow will know, as does the Business Committee, I have written to the First Minister and the deputy First Minister about that matter, as well as other Ministers. I have also sent a letter to the Committee on Procedures, asking it to look at the situation.

As Lord Morrow knows, I have no real power to resolve the issue. I always encourage Ministers, especially the First Minister and the deputy First Minister, through the Executive, to look at this issue alone. A number of Members have raised it in the House. It is only through frustration that Members have no option but to come to the House to highlight the issue. I intend not only to write to the First Minister and the deputy First Minister about the matter but to speak to them about it when I meet them again. It is a big issue, and we must try to resolve it.

Mr Dallat: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You will remember that, during questions to the First Minister, parallels were drawn between the Republic of Ireland and Zimbabwe by the Member for North Antrim Mr Allister. Do you agree that that was, at best, disgraceful and, at worst, appalling, given that Zimbabwe is guilty of tens of thousands of murders and has famine on a desperate scale? It bears no relationship to the Republic of Ireland. This should not have happened in the House.

Mr Speaker: I hear the Member's point of order. Oh dear, if I were to get involved in every issue and comment that Members made in the House, I could probably write a book about them. Members from all sides of the House will know that I do not generally get involved in comments that Members make, except when unparliamentary language is used or comments are made that go beyond the debate. It is very difficult to sit in judgement on the point of order that the Member rightly makes. It is certainly not for the Chair to judge on comments that are made generally in the House, especially in the cut and thrust of debate.

Executive Committee Business

Marine Bill: Second Stage

Debate resumed on motion:

That the Second Stage of the Marine Bill [NIA 5/11-15] be agreed. — [Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment).]

Mr McGlone: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht an Bille seo a thabhairt os ár gcomhair inniu. I thank the Minister and his officials for their hard work in bringing the Bill before us today. It deals with the protection of the marine environment, potentially for many years to come. Such a strategic, plan-led system is important to us all as we seek to preserve, conserve and, indeed, sustain that marine environment.

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

The Bill touches on a number of issues. Officials gave a presentation to the Committee for the Environment last week, and I was glad to hear about the positive working relationship that they have established with other Departments. Let us hope that that continues, because there will be tremendous overlap with the responsibilities and duties of other Departments. The Bill raises issues specifically on matters that are the responsibility of other Departments and, indeed, the responsibility of the Department of the Environment itself. The Bill says that the Department has to take all reasonable steps to ensure compatibility between a marine plan and any related terrestrial development plan. That, clearly, has consequential effects on development plans and area plans, as they may be known in those areas, and planning policy statements. There may well be a read-across or implications that are internal to the Department with the development of a Marine Bill. I am sure that the Minister will take those comments and views into consideration as the Bill evolves.

Specifically with regard to the strategic plan-led system to inform people, stimulate interest and generate confidence in the process and the decisions that we make in the marine area, I have one cautionary word at this point. When we come to sea or, more importantly, land in Irish waters or in Ireland, it is important that all sensitivities around land ownership are fully acknowledged as part of the consultation process and that proper consultation takes place with commercial or other business interests or, indeed, other voluntary and community interests. I am sure that the Department will do that. Co-operation will be key, as will be the introduction of Bills.

The marine plan to identify the relevant activities in certain areas, look at changing economic and social trends and an area's resources and changing ecosystems will have to take into account interests that may sporadically arise around the shore, on the shore or offshore. Those interests could be as far-ranging as fishing interests, quarrying interests or, indeed, other renewable energy interests, as well as the normal conservation and environmental interests that impact on the development of the marine offshore and that bit of it that is onshore. As we heard on Thursday, other Departments, including DARD, DRD, DETI and DCAL, have all

had a significant input during the preparation of the marine policy statement.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member for giving way. He touches on an issue that has been raised by several Members during the debate, which is the complexity of a Marine Bill and of trying to ensure that it works fluently and to the benefit of everyone concerned. Does he agree that the success or otherwise of the Bill will, to a large degree, depend on each of the relevant Departments working cohesively to deliver a Bill that people will trust and rely on for generations to come?

Mr McGlone: Absolutely, and I thank the Member for his intervention. That will be key to it. Not only that, but Departments and external bodies, including voluntary organisations, landowners, businesses and other social interests all have an input into how a marine management organisation comes together and performs its full functions to ensure that there is collaboration. They all have an input into the working of the Bill. As I mentioned at the start, good co-operation and collaboration will be the key to the success of the Bill and the future of the marine environment.

I was seeking to expand on that very point about the Departments. Their work does not stop within our jurisdiction. The Department of the Environment has liaised and co-operated with officials at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government in Dublin, and, indeed, the SDLP will meet Minister Phil Hogan very shortly. The Bill will be among a number of issues raised with him of key environmental concern and benefit to us all. We do not and should not forget that, although the North is important to us all, it is but a small bit of this island, and the conservation and preservation of the marine environment has to consider and factor in real and important all-island consequences.

Other issues have arisen, including managing competing interests in the marine area. We have already mentioned that a key part of that must be collaboration between Departments and external bodies, as all will fill the role in the marine management organisation.

It is important to consult key stakeholders on the marine conservation zones. You were at a recent meeting of the Environment Committee, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, at which we saw that people travel along different pathways to get to the one point. I am talking about modiolus modiolus and the debate between local conservation interests — some regard them as not local but regional conservation interests — and fishing interests. Perhaps — I say “perhaps” — a different approach could have reached a point of accommodation more quickly. Therefore, that consultation and how it is managed will be vital.

I turn to the time frame for the delivery of the network of marine conservation zones. We have heard that Strangford lough is set to become one of the first. It may provide us with some concept of how best to revisit the issue of consultation with and collaboration between all the interests on that lough. It may provide us with a new starting point at which those interests, which became competing interests but should not have, will have an opportunity to start afresh without notes being fired off to Europe. Maybe people from the one region could work more closely together to achieve a very positive outcome.

That brings me on to my next point: effective engagement with key stakeholders. I have sought private reassurances

— I am sure that the Minister will elaborate on this, too — that it will not become a fisheries management tool but that fisheries’ interests will be worked with as part of the management and the way forward.

We have heard about how important the marine management organisation is. The key issues are to avoid duplication of effort and expenditure; to work collaboratively between Departments; to engage in research; to ensure that there is one focus point for management; and to make sure that we have good collaborative working. There is the potential for management by silo. Thankfully, we heard that we will not take that negative route. That is not where any of us want to go. While a sectoral approach exists, it would prove very useful for the marine environment if all the interests were to work together in that marine management organisation. I am sure that the Minister will elaborate on how that will deliver marine planning and deal with licensing, enforcement and the management of migratory fisheries or other such zone management issues. Key economic, social and environmental interests all merge into one as we seek to conserve and preserve and develop our marine environment and, indeed, positively to develop it.

With such matters, there will always be debate on what the cost might be. I will ask my colleague to elaborate on that. To me, however, it is not a cost but an investment in the future of our marine environment to ensure that we, as legislators and politicians, leave to the people of this island a positive legacy of a clean, bright and developing marine environment in which things are nurtured and sustainability not only remains static but improves.

3.45 pm

Mr Allister: The Bill — it is not unique in this — leaves a number of unanswered questions. The first unanswered question arises from the very first line of clause 1:

“In this Act the ‘Northern Ireland inshore region’ means the area of sea within the seaward limits of the territorial sea of the United Kingdom adjacent to Northern Ireland, including the bed and subsoil of the sea within that area.”

The question that that immediately raises is this: does that definition include Lough Foyle or any part of Carlingford lough? The Minister has been clear that there is no doubt that it includes that almost inland lough, Strangford lough, but he has not yet given us the benefit of his opinion as to whether or not the Bill extends to Lough Foyle, for example. Of course, historically and legally, in proprietary terms, Lough Foyle falls within the control of the Crown Estate. The historical and legal position is that that extends not only to the seabed but to the high water mark on the Donegal side. It seems to me, from reading the Bill, that it does not even attempt to extend itself to Lough Foyle. Is that right, or am I wrong about that? Will the Minister expound on that for us?

Clause 1(5) states:

“The boundaries between the parts of the territorial sea of the United Kingdom adjacent to Northern Ireland and the parts not so adjacent are to be determined by reference to an Order in Council under section 98(8) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998”.

Of course, there is such an order; I have a copy of it in my hand. It is the Adjacent Waters Boundaries (Northern

Ireland) Order 2002, but it does not answer the question of where the boundary is — if there is any — that applies to Lough Foyle or Carlingford lough. Clause 1(5), by making reference to the order made under section 98 of the 1998 Act, does not really take us any further. Is it the situation that, whereas Strangford lough will be regulated, either by light touch or heavy touch, any part of the waters of Carlingford lough and Lough Foyle are beyond the remit of the Bill — by design, it would appear? We need to know what the Minister says about the geographical extent of the Bill in respect of the inshore waters to which it purports to extend.

Irrespective of precisely where the Bill extends, does the Minister accept that it does nothing to change the ownership of the seabed or the foreshore and that that still lies within the Crown Estate, or is that contention challenged? I notice that, in last week's 'Londonderry Sentinel', there was fresh controversy about the extent of ownership and who has the ownership of Lough Foyle, with the Republic of Ireland Minister claiming that the Foyle shore is Irish, as he gives consent to a discharge within it. The newspaper properly pointed out the historical and legal position, which, in fact, probably prevented the infrastructure for the Kelvin project coming up Lough Foyle because of the dispute about the ownership of it.

If we are to have a Marine Bill, we need clarity from the Minister and the Executive about whether or not it extends to either Carlingford lough or Lough Foyle. If it does not, why not? Those are issues that the Minister needs to explain to the House as the Bill proceeds. Clause 2(2) says:

"Where a marine policy statement governs marine planning for the Northern Ireland inshore region, the Department must seek to ensure that every part of that region is within an area for which a marine plan is in effect."

In clause 2, we have a statutory duty, almost, on the Department to "seek to ensure" that every part is covered. Yet, we have, it would appear, this lacuna around whether Lough Foyle and Carlingford lough, in the first instance, ever even come within the ambit of the Bill. I repeat that we need confirmation of the position as the Bill will be applied.

Some of the wording in the Bill puzzles me. Staying with clause 2, I note that the first such phrase arises in subsection (5). It has just set out what a marine plan is. Subsection (4) says that that:

"must identify (by means of a map or otherwise) the marine plan area".

Subsection (5) goes on to say:

"Unless relevant considerations indicate otherwise, a marine plan must be in conformity —

(a) with any marine policy statement".

And so it goes on. However, what are the words "Unless relevant considerations indicate otherwise" meant to mean? Whose standards does one apply to whether there are relevant considerations to indicate that the marine plan need not be in conformity with the marine policy statement? I do not think that we can draft and pass a Bill that is as vague and uninformative as that, with a let-out clause to say that there are certain circumstances, which are not specified, in which a marine plan may not have to comply

with the marine policy statement. So, what does it mean when it says:

"Unless relevant considerations indicate otherwise, a marine plan must be in conformity —

(a) with any marine policy statement"?

Is that a totally open-ended statement to be interpreted on a whim based on whatever the particular circumstances are? Are there any parameters for how it is to be interpreted? By whose standards is it to be interpreted? "Unless relevant considerations indicate otherwise" just does not tell me anything about the circumstances in which, definitively, you can decree that a marine policy does not have to conform with a marine policy statement.

I want to tie that observation to some of the content of the Bill in relation to the capacity for legal challenge. One can see straight away just how open to legal challenge the meaning and interpretation of phrases like "Unless relevant considerations indicate otherwise" would be. That makes it very germane to enquire how challengeable, under the Bill, issues are that inform the content or otherwise of a marine policy statement. Are they or are they not challengeable under clause 8(4)? It would seem not, and I will explain that now.

Clause 8 is an interesting one. It has to be read with clause 9. On the validity of marine plans, it tells us:

"(1) This section applies to—

(a) any marine plan ...

(2) Anything falling within the ... subsection ... is referred to in this section as a 'relevant document'."

So, a relevant document is a marine plan. It goes on then to say:

"(3) A relevant document must not be questioned in any legal proceedings, except in so far as is provided by the following provisions of this section."

The section allows an aggrieved person to make an application to the High Court if the document:

"is not within the appropriate powers"

— in other words, if it is ultra vires — or if:

"a procedural requirement has not been complied with."

Those appear to be the only grounds on which a marine plan can be questioned in any legal proceedings. Straight away, we seem to have a lesser facility for judicial challenge under the Bill than we would have in common public law. Under judicial review, which seems to be ruled out by the clause, you could challenge a plan on the basis of what is called Wednesbury unreasonableness: the proposition is so unreasonable that no reasonable body, Minister or Department could have come up with it. The fundamentals of judicial review are that there is either procedural irregularity or what I have called Wednesbury unreasonableness. The effect of clause 8 and clause 9 seems to be to give a lesser opportunity for challenge than exists even under judicial review. Is that the intent of the Minister? Indeed, is that compatible with the article 6 duties under the European convention, where one has to

have the right to a fair hearing to make your case? If you are an aggrieved person under a marine plan and you are told by clause 8 that your hands are tied behind your back in respect of aspects that would be available to you otherwise, that raises the question of whether it is article 6-compliant. The Department needs to look at that.

The very issue of being able to challenge on procedural grounds is further diminished by what we read in clause 9. Whereas clause 8(4) says that an aggrieved person may make an application to the High Court because a procedural requirement has not been complied with, when we go to clause 9(3) and clause 9(4), we discover that it is not as simple as that. In order to succeed in court, you have to show that substantial prejudice is the reason for failing to comply with a procedural requirement. Clause 8(4) seems to give the aggrieved person the right to bring a High Court challenge if there is a procedural requirement that has not been complied with, but clause 9(3) and 9(4) say that he can succeed in that challenge only if he can show not just procedural irregularity but substantial prejudice by reason of procedural irregularity. Why is that? Why are the rights of an aggrieved person further diminished? At a stroke, his right to challenge on unreasonableness grounds has been removed, and even his right to challenge on procedural grounds is further diminished by raising the bar and saying that he must demonstrate substantial prejudice before he can succeed. You are not even guaranteed to succeed then, because clause 9(4) says that the court “may”, in consequence of the substantial prejudice, “quash the relevant document”. The bar is raised, and there is no guarantee of remedy. At that point, it is wholly at the discretion of the court whether you are afforded a remedy.

In clause 8 and clause 9, there are serious issues that need to be addressed. Why are we trimming back the already substantially reduced facilities under judicial review? If that can be done legally, the legislation seems to suggest that that will be the case.

Why are we trimming that back and raising the bar on the one surviving ground of what equates to a judicial review challenge, the procedural irregularity, by saying that that will only succeed at the discretion of the judge if you demonstrate substantial prejudice? There are issues there that need to be addressed.

4.00 pm

I come back to clause 6, which provides for decisions affected by a marine plan, and states that a public authority, as defined in clause 46:

“must take any authorisation or enforcement decision in accordance with any appropriate marine plan, unless relevant considerations indicate otherwise.”

There is that phrase again. What does it mean that “unless relevant considerations indicate otherwise” the public authority must take enforcement action? In whose eyes must it be relevant to “indicate otherwise”? Is it simply in the eye of the beholder? Is it in the eye of the public authority? Is it an objective or a subjective test? If it is simply in the eye of the beholder, the Department or the public authority, it would appear to be just a subjective test. So I caution against putting into the Bill language that is so imprecise in meaning.

When you look at what is a public authority, does it include the Loughs Agency? Maybe the Minister will tell us. On the face of it, clause 46 may lead one to think that it does not. Is that because of this lacuna in relation to Lough Foyle? Perhaps not. That loose phraseology about “considerations” indicating “otherwise” needs to be tightened up.

Clause 6(4) states:

“An ‘authorisation or enforcement decision’ is any of the following ... the determination of any application ... for authorisation of the doing of any act which affects or might affect the whole or any part of the Northern Ireland inshore region”.

Issues such as the salmon nets off the north coast immediately come to my mind. Where in the Bill is the supremacy that determines whether the rights or powers given under the Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1966 —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to take his seat for a moment. I am sure that the debate is interesting to Members, but I remind the Member that the Second Stage debate is on the general principles of the Bill. The close, clause-by-clause scrutiny is for another stage. I ask the Member to take that into account.

Mr Allister: An important general principle of a Bill is whether it makes sense, adds up and whether it opens issues that are unanswered. I think that clause 6(4) raises questions of whether, for example, salmon net licensing will become a function to be exercised by a public authority. It may be that the Minister can shed some light on that.

Part 3 of the Bill concerns the designation of marine conservation zones, and here we come to a degree of difficulty that affects the entirety of the legislation. I am mindful that the Bill in its current form is due to the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, which was introduced at Westminster and is part of the matrix for all of this. The 2009 Act was the brainchild of the Labour Party and many parts of it were opposed by those who are now the Conservative Government. We have a Fisheries Minister whom I have heard say that, when it comes to marine conservation zones, his will be a light-touch approach.

If we are to have a patchwork of control that means that inshore waters are to be subject to an MCZ made by the Environment Minister in Northern Ireland — likewise the marine policy statement and the marine plan for inshore waters — but an MCZ for offshore waters beyond the 12-mile limit is to be made by the Secretary of State in Westminster, are we not courting the utmost conflict and difficulty because the reality is that, when you cross that line, you may well face total disparity in what is expected short of 12 miles and permitted beyond 12 miles?

Here is my biggest concern: when those who earn their living at sea — the fishing community that fishes the Irish Sea — go out to fish, they may be faced with more zealous, enthusiastic, heavy-touch regulation from the Environment Minister of this House up to the end of the inshore line and, beyond that, a lighter touch from the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. We should not shrug our shoulders about that and wait to see what happens. Why would we be in the business of putting structures and mechanisms in place that allow that to happen? Indeed,

according to the Bill, there might be an MMO within the offshore but no MMO within the inshore.

Surely there is logic and sense in considering how to coalesce and ensure that the applied regulation is as uniform as it can be, a light touch and a heavy touch are not applied to the same Irish Sea and fishermen are not in the position in which they do not know what they can do here as opposed to what they can do somewhere else and are also subject to the most difficult self-policing. Does that not raise a challenge to the very fundamentals of the Bill? Why are there disparate, localised marine plans when we could have the certainty of unified, some might say centralised, marine plans that would apply throughout the waters, inshore or offshore? However, the Bill is built on the foundation blocks of doing our own thing, never mind what might be just beyond the limit nor the difficulties that that creates for the fishing community. For me, that is a substantial concern about the Bill's *raison d'être* and why it is going in that direction.

The Minister touched on the following issue. Will he tell me whether I am right in my reading of clause 11(4), reading across to clauses 13(3) and 13(4), that Rathlin Island in my constituency could be included in a marine policy area? Given that it is an island, perhaps sharing a number of the features of the waters around it, could Rathlin Island, under clause 11(4), be part of the policy area? Perhaps the Minister can put my mind at ease, or perhaps he will confirm my fears.

I now turn to the enforcement section of the Bill. Clause 31 talks about a "person without lawful excuse" doing a prohibited act. I assume from that, and the Minister will tell me if I am wrong, that the onus of proving that it is no lawful excuse lies with the prosecution and to the standard of "beyond all reasonable doubt", and that that would be part of the proofs that those prosecuting would have to take.

You then turn to clause 32(4), and you read:

"It is a defence for a person who is charged with an offence under section 31 to show that ... the act which is alleged to constitute the offence was ... an act done for the purpose of, and in the course of, sea fishing, or ... the effect of the act on the protected feature in question could not reasonably have been avoided."

Will the Minister confirm that I am right to conclude that when that defence is raised, whereas the onus is on the defence in the raising of it, the standard of proof is only on the balance of probabilities and that the fisherman charged, for example, with a prohibited act, whose defence is that he was fishing and that he could not reasonably have avoided it, has to show that that is true on the balance of probabilities, and he does not have to show that beyond all reasonable doubt? With regard to how other legislation is normally framed, that is probably right, but I think it important to have that confirmed by the Minister.

I express some concern about clause 32(5). Clause 32(4) is the clause that I have just read, about the right of a fisherman to raise a defence that he could not reasonably have avoided the damage caused. However, clause 32(5) then says:

"The Department may by order amend this section so as to remove, or restrict the application of, the defence provided by subsection (4)."

That, I must say, is a most draconian and inappropriate inclusion in this Act. You set forth a legitimate, lawful line of defence, passed as primary legislation in this House, but then you tuck into it, at clause 32(5), a provision that allows you, at a later date, to put your pen through it. I do not think that that is the right way to make law, particularly touching upon the rights of the individual that are enshrined in article 6 and everything else. So, I would like some amplification as to why the Minister thinks we need clause 32(5). It seems to me to be a clause that is most definitely open to abuse — not that I am suggesting that this Minister would abuse it, but it has been known from time to time for Ministers to abuse their position. Better to take temptation out of the way than to take the risk, and so I wonder why clause 32(5) is in those terms.

Those are some observations, but I come back to a fundamental issue. We are creating a process of legislation that will impose on the users of the sea, particularly fishermen, a great disparity of expectation and lack of uniformity as to what they are allowed to do where. Those are fundamental issues. Having raised those points, I look forward to the Minister's response.

Mr Agnew: I am working on a private Member's Bill, and I think I might run it by Jim before I present it to the House. I do not envy the Minister in having to respond to some of Jim's points. Equally, I am glad that it is the Finance Minister, Mr Wilson, and the DUP's Miss McIlveen who are marking my homework. I am not sure that I would like to give Jim Allister the red pen for my work.

4.15 pm

To come back to the debate, I have an interest in this issue as leader of the Green Party in Northern Ireland and as a father. My young son, at three-and-a-half years old, has already got quite a keen interest in marine life, thanks particularly to the programme 'Octonauts'. Recently, I have been watching the BBC series 'Planet Earth' with him, which is presented by David Attenborough. We have watched a number of the ones that look at our oceans and seas, and David Attenborough inspires our wonder in the many species that live on and off our planet. However, all too often, Attenborough laments that those species, of which he articulates his wonder, are in decline, more often than not due to human activity. In fact, approximately 200 plant and animal species are lost every day, mostly due to human activity. I mention that programme because it reminds us of the treasures that we have but also cautions us about what we could lose.

The Marine Bill presents Northern Ireland with an opportunity to preserve and enhance the marine life in our seas. For that reason, I welcome the Bill's Second Stage today and the discussion on these issues. There are, of course, various interest groups that have an interest in the Bill, such as conservation groups, the fishing community, the offshore renewables industry, the tourism industry and the shipping industry.

We need to seek a balance of needs. To date, we have not got that right. We recently debated the issue of *modiolus modiolus* in Strangford lough; a species so great it had to be named twice. Despite the various designations in Strangford lough, we have failed to properly govern it and have seen a

decline in that species, a species that most other life in the lough relies on.

It is important that in governance, we look not just to the needs of now but the needs of future generations. My mum always taught me to leave things how I had found them, often when referring to tidying up after I had made a mess. To some extent, that principle is at the core of what sustainable development is all about. An often-cited definition of development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In that regard, business as usual is not an option.

We have strong evidence of where we are failing to protect the species and habitats that currently exist, and the decline in numbers of many species is the best example of that. Indeed, only 4% of our seas is protected. I mentioned Strangford lough as being the most protected area that we have, yet failures have been highlighted in relation to that area. So, we need to go some way to improve our management of our marine environment.

Cathal Boylan stressed that this should not be a conflict between economic and environmental needs. If we are willing to look at the longer term and not just the here and now, we can do that. Look at Wales: the Government there have worked alongside the fishing industry in getting marine protection that is beneficial to conservation and to the long-term sustainability of the fishing industry. When it comes to the renewable energy industry, I am as keen as anyone to promote renewable energy so that we see growth in that industry, jobs created and independence in our energy needs. However, we have to balance that with the need to conserve and protect biodiversity and habitat. To be fair, the renewable energy industry has a pretty good track record, certainly with onshore wind and working with the likes of the RSPB and the Department of the Environment to ensure that the development of that industry does not compromise the need to promote and enhance biodiversity.

In fact, there is no better project than SeaGen in Strangford lough, where all efforts have been made, including cross-working between the industry, the Department of the Environment and others, to ensure that it has not been detrimental to marine life. I remember that there were fears that the marine turbine could chop up dolphins, which was a legitimate concern because there were a lot of unknowns. I also heard the contrary view that the turbines would just sweep the dolphins along, and it would be almost like a playground ride for them. I am not sure that that is quite the case, but we have been able to show that marine life and offshore renewable energy technologies can go hand in hand.

The Bill has the potential to provide certainty to the renewable energy industry. The absence of a Bill and clear guidance on what we can do and where is detrimental. Clarity about the direction in which we are heading will give greater certainty to those seeking to invest in offshore renewables.

Coming back to the issue of protection, I intended to mention this when I spoke about Strangford lough. During the modiolus debate, the Isle of Man and Lundy Island's strong protections were mentioned. In fact, their going further than simply being permissive has allowed fish stocks to repopulate and brought benefits that conservationists as well as the fishing industry like to see. So coming back to

Cathal Boylan's point, I feel that there does not have to be a conflict between economic and environmental needs. Good governance will benefit all.

The Bill legislates for the production of marine plans and the creation of marine conservation zones. It is key that the two go hand in hand. There is fear in the environmental sector that although we may get a marine plan quickly, the marine conservation zones are still a long way off. A plan not based on conservation zones may not bring as much value as it could.

Equally, we have yet to see the nature of marine conservation zones and whether they will provide strong or less strong protection. There are highly protected areas in other UK legislation. To some extent, if those terms are not defined, they are just words. We need certainty about what terms will mean. What will a marine conservation zone mean? Will we, for example, have non-disturbance areas or no-take zones? Hopefully, the Minister will address those issues in his response, and we can also progress them as the stages of the Bill progress. Good governance is key, and the Bill is, perhaps, an acknowledgement that the governance of our marine environment is not as good as it could be.

The complex nature of the issue has been highlighted. The Departments and agencies that have an interest and, to some extent, a role in governance of our marine environment are many and varied. For example, DOE has responsibility for the protection of the marine environment and for combating climate change, to name just a few; DETI has responsibility for offshore renewables, undersea telecommunications and tourism; DARD has responsibility for sea fisheries and aquaculture; DCAL has responsibility for wild salmon fisheries; and DRD has responsibilities for ports and the disposal of sewage. So many Departments and agencies are involved that we are often left unsure as to who governs and who has responsibility for the protection of those areas. Where there is confusion, good governance can often fail.

That brings me to the issue of marine management organisations. I do not want to disappoint the Minister by not mentioning them, as he suspected that I would mention them. We have heard a lot of questions being asked about the cost of marine management organisations, and, rightly so, because finances are not limitless. We should always do a cost-benefit analysis of any proposal, but it is important to highlight the costs that we are already incurring as a result of the current governance structures, which, in my view, are quite unwieldy.

Tony McCusker, a former deputy secretary of DOE and former director of policy with DARD, produced a report in which he estimated the cost of managing a marine environment to be around £7.1 million per year. His assessment of what it would cost for a marine management organisation was around £650,000 upfront, but by rationalising the number of agencies that have responsibility for our marine environment, we could save around £250,000 per year. So I would be interested to hear what advice the Minister has received in respect of the cost of an MMO and whether he agrees with those figures. If those figures are accurate — Mr McCusker has certainly high-level experience in these matters — then, as well as providing good governance, a marine management organisation may well be cost-efficient.

Before an MMO has even been established or we have even discussed what it would look like, it has been dismissed as

a quango. We hear that term every time we want to knock a particular body. People say, "It is just a quango." It is as if by saying that quangos are a bad thing, it means that this must be a bad thing. The same people who lambast quangos will defend and promote Invest NI, which is a very expensive quango with very plush offices in Belfast. The question is: does the benefit that it brings justify the cost? Rather than just saying that it is a quango, we have to look at what benefit a marine management organisation would bring, what the costs would be and whether a cost-benefit analysis will come out favourably.

As the Minister highlighted, we cannot have good governance without enforcement. It is important that any legislation and whatever bodies are required to enforce the legislation are sufficiently resourced. That means the Department of the Environment being sufficiently resourced and the Minister ensuring that the resources are adequately targeted in the right areas.

4.30 pm

Under the legislation, there is a proposed maximum fine of £50,000 for breaches of the regulations. That would be a significant deterrent for most people. Mr Weir suggested that, in certain circumstances, we may be able to go beyond £50,000. I would like more information on that from the Minister. If so, in what cases could we go beyond that amount? I am concerned about the proposals to drill for oil on and around Rathlin Island. When it comes to the oil industry, I fear that £50,000 would be seen as a necessary and acceptable cost of its working. If we look at the oil spill off Florida, the damage that was caused there and the billions of pounds in costs that were incurred by the company involved, £50,000 seems quite small. I have concerns about that. I think that £50,000 would be considerable for most users of our seas. However, when we have so many proposals for petroleum licences, I would want to ensure that we would have sufficient regulation to deter any poor-quality use of our marine environment or the damage or destruction of our environment.

I welcome the tabling of the Bill. To be fair to the Minister, he has outlined that we are already behind other regions of the UK. Mr Allister pointed out that England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland will have separate pieces of legislation. It would have been preferable had we been able to go along with the Westminster timetable. As a new Member, I am not fully aware of the reasons why we did not do that. It would have been preferable, but we are here now, and it is about getting the best legislation.

We are behind the UK, and the UK Government — England and Wales, I should say — are already under significant pressure from the European Union to get their marine protection zones in place. Therefore we are at a considerable disadvantage, as we are a couple of years behind.

As is so often the case when we discuss these issues, we end up referring to possible infractions from Europe. It is regrettable that we often need that threat to motivate us. In these issues, we should be proactive in protecting the species in our seas. Mr Hamilton cautioned against going too far and being too restrictive, but we have been too permissive to date. If we continue with lax regulation and continue to allow destruction, we will have to be more and more restrictive in the use of our seas. It is better to tackle

these issues early so that we do not have to go too far in future. The sooner we act, the better the outcomes will be. As I said, good governance of the marine environment can be beneficial to conservationists and industry alike.

We have a responsibility to the here and now, but we have a responsibility to future generations as well. I want to be able to tell my son that when I was in the Assembly, we did everything that we could to promote and enhance the biodiversity of our seas and to prevent biodiversity loss and decline.

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I thank Members who contributed to the debate. This is a very important stage of the Marine Bill before it goes into Committee. It is an opportunity to scope issues on the policy or on the political side, because some of these issues end up being political and party political calls. Also, technical and legal issues were raised, particularly by Mr Kinahan and Mr Allister.

I hope to be able to answer Members in my response and that those answers will help to examine the scope of the Bill and to identify areas where we need to create certainty in the Bill if people feel there is no certainty at the moment. Mr Weir made the point that we have to get the details right, technically and in law, to ensure that we are performing within vires. We also need to get it right for future generations, as Mr Agnew said, and identify any issues in the Bill that will need to be addressed in its future stages.

I acknowledge and thank all those who contributed. There were some very thorough contributions, and I welcome thorough questioning and accountability. On a day when there have been a number of congratulations and best wishes offered to people outside the Chamber, I think it is only timely to convey best wishes to Mr Agnew for this week when his second child is expected. I hope that everything goes well.

I will deal with some of the specific points raised by Members and some of the general themes that were touched on in no particular order, but I will start with the comments of Anna Lo and Mr Boylan. They rightly pointed to the inclusion of a statement of public participation in the Bill, which is a very important principle. As Mr Boylan captured in his contribution, there is a difference between consultation, of which there is a lot in this part of the world, and participation, of which there is much less, in developing public policy.

The purpose of consultation is for it to be of such a quality and scale that it is participation and that it is not ticking boxes and consulting for its own sake. I think that the statement of public participation in the Bill is a model that we need to deploy more widely as we go forward, not least in local government reorganisation and community planning. If there is no participation, planning — whether marine, community or commercial development — is a lesser creature than it should be and less fit to meet the needs of our community.

A number of Members, including Anna Lo, Mr Agnew and others, touched on enforcement. Good planning without good enforcement is not a good system. Whether it is environmental, marine or wider planning enforcement, if you do not have the resources and structures in place to pursue it, there will be places and times where planning does violence to the community and to its interests. I have tried to make it clear to officials that we must be robust on a

case-by-case basis and that we need to identify how to enforce the range of enforcement issues on a more robust basis.

The environmental crime unit, which could have relevance in respect of the Marine Bill, the marine plan and marine conservation zones in the fullness of time, is a model that, in my view, needs to be escalated across the Department to ensure that the Department is seen to be fit for purpose on planning where there are still challenges and fit for purpose on enforcement. People — whether rogue fisherman, rogue developers, rogue farmers or whoever — must understand that if they are on the wrong side of the law, the weight of the law will come down upon them. I want to give that reassurance.

There were a number of comments in respect of the marine management organisation from Mervyn Storey, Anna Lo, Mr Agnew, Mr Kinahan and his colleague, who dissented from his view — he has joined us now — and, I understand, spoke on behalf of the party. Mr Agnew captured the issue very effectively when he pointed out that whatever the financial costs of an MMO, the financial risks to the public purse in the North, never mind the financial considerations, are acute.

The House debated the potential for infraction proceedings arising from the modiolus issue in Strangford lough four or five weeks ago. I made the point that that may yet come to bear on the Government in the North and that in the United Kingdom, infraction fines start at £8 million, with daily interest charges and penalties thereafter. Given the scale of infraction fines that are to be faced on agriculture, if the Agriculture Minister concluded that better management of agriculture through an agricultural management organisation could mitigate the risk of those fines in future, I think that the Agriculture Minister might be minded to go in that direction.

Step back from the marine issue. Step back from the issue of fishing interests and all others who value and have an interest in marine issues. Given the scale of environmental regulation from Europe, the financial impact alone of potential infraction suggests to me that there is a financial imperative to interrogate the option of an MMO, never mind an environmental reason. The weight of environmental regulation will not decline or diminish over the next 10, 20 or 30 years; it will escalate. I will touch on this in reply to some of Mr Allister's points, but the Bill, its consequences and the actions of the devolved arrangements are all of a character and scale that, at times, you must make strategic leaps to deal with where we are and where we are going to be. In my view, an MMO becomes a more feasible option given those circumstances.

I am very mindful of what Executive colleagues have said in our conversations on this matter. To come back to issues that were raised by Mr Hamilton and Mr Weir, I believe that you can create a model of MMO that does not carry the costs of other non-departmental public bodies. As I have said before, when I came into DOE, I suppressed the deputy permanent secretary's post, saving in excess of £100,000; money that could then go to other activities of the Department. We can identify ways of managing organisations that reduce cost without any loss of service. In fact, I believe that DOE is more fit with one less deputy permanent secretary. The senior management will be more strategic and stand back from the noise of the day to work through, in a more systemic way, how to respond.

4.45 pm

There are opportunities to model an MMO in a way that is not as cost burdensome as some people suggest. Yes, we have to develop a business case to give reassurances if required. Beyond the business case and the true cost of an MMO, we have to stand back and answer the question that Mr Weir put in his contribution about the consequences of the lack of a joined-up approach. He said:

"a more integrated approach at an earlier stage could have ... not left us in the current situation."

That was his commentary on the threat of infraction proceedings due to the modiolus issue in Strangford lough. I think that that is an eloquent argument: the way that we have managed marine issues to date, including those relating to Strangford lough, has put us on the wrong side of potential infraction proceedings costing £8 million, and it could have been different. There are ways of doing things differently that do not need an MMO. However, the reality has been that the territoriality of Departments in protecting legitimate business and wider interests, which is understandable, has sometimes got in the way of our managing significant issues and threats and of mitigating the risk of such threats. Arguably, that has not been the case in respect of the modiolus issue, and so on and so forth, in respect of a litany of other possibilities as we go down the road.

Anno Lo raised a question in respect of the timeline for implementation. I indicated that we are working towards a number of standards. The UK Government, on behalf of themselves and the devolved regions, have said that they want to achieve good ecological status by 2020: that is the aspiration. My view is that working towards that outcome, the Marine Bill, the marine conservation zones and creating that architecture are all time-limited. We are not working towards 2020; we are working towards 2014 and 2015, in order to bring all that to fruition.

In that regard, I want to deal with one or two points that Mr Allister raised. He said that he heard some London Minister say that there is going to be a light touch. I am sure that they might have sent out the message that there is going to be a light touch compared with that of the Labour Government, which might have more warmly embraced the direction of travel in Europe. However, regardless of whether the words "light touch" were used, the evidence confirms that they are actually going for more than a light touch. So, what is the evidence that they are doing so? First, they have signed up to good ecological status by 2020, the details of which I accept have yet to be worked out. Secondly, it was not the Northern Ireland Government, the Welsh Government or the Scottish Government who identified five potential sites in the Irish Sea for a conservation zone regional project; it was those in DEFRA, Caroline Spelman and all the officials who will be at the environment Council meeting in Europe this Friday, which I am attending.

So, on the one hand we are being told that London is going for a light touch. However, on the other hand, the evidence, besides some worn, meaningless phrase issued by some anonymous Minister from DEFRA in London, is that we are signing up to good ecological status and to looking at five potential sites in the Irish Sea for a conservation zone. With the Northern Ireland Government, we have also signed off on new zones with marine special status around Rathlin.

I confirm that Rathlin will be captured — this is the good news for you, Mr Allister — by the reach of the Marine Bill, and rightly so. The damage done to some of the seabed off Rathlin Island, in the context that we discovered 26 species of sponge unknown in any part of the world until now, demonstrates that we have some particular obligations around Rathlin and that you can moderate the activities of fisherman through sustainable fishing, which provides incomes for those fisherman and, at the same time, protects that asset.

Mr Allister, if we send out a message to the world that we want people to come to enjoy what is arguably our single greatest built asset — the Causeway Coast, the land that stretches from Rathlin Island, through Ballycastle, Ballintoy, Portrush, Portstewart, Coleraine and Magilligan — and spend more of their tourist moneys, and at the same time send out a message that we do not care about the water between Ballycastle and Rathlin Island and the water beyond Rathlin Island, we are sending out a false message to people in the North, never mind all the tourists whom we want to come to the North.

I will deal with some of the other issues that Mr Allister raised. I confirm that Strangford lough, Carlingford lough and Lough Foyle will all be subject to our territorial responsibility and the reach of the Marine Bill and any activities that arise thereafter. It is the case, and we have had this debate on the Floor of the Assembly before, that the Crown Estate is responsible for the seabed and that it is a reserved matter under the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Nonetheless, as the Loughs Agency manifestly demonstrates, the responsibility for certain issues is devolved to the Northern Ireland Government working, it so happens, with our sister Government in the rest of this island. The legal ownership of the Crown Estate, including the seabed, rests with the Crown Estate, but the control of the seabed, how we manage it and manage licences that might be given for offshore renewable energy falls to us. Therefore, there is no tension here. I do not know the point that Mr Allister was trying to make around that, if it was not just politics. The legal situation as to who owns and who controls it is clear. The legal authority that we have in respect of all of that is quite clear.

Mr Allister: To keep it to Lough Foyle, what is the Minister saying about the extent of control? Is it the entirety of Lough Foyle or is it a midway point? That is what I would like the Minister to be clear about.

Mr Attwood: Mr Allister knows the answer to that question. He knows that there is ongoing discussion between the respective Governments about where boundaries in Lough Foyle begin and end. He knows that. He knows that that is the answer that I was going to give to him, yet he wants to make constitutional points when everybody else in the Chamber made points about the marine environment. I do not think that legislation should become the victim of a constitutional argument about where a line begins and ends in Lough Foyle. I do not think that that is good government, good politics or good for the marine environment. I am not making this point to Mr Allister, but there is a danger that we end up being somewhat indulgent around points of law when we should be indulging the needs of marine management and the environment.

Mr Allister made other points — other good points. These are the better points. I do not want to diminish — *[Interruption.]* Sorry?

Mr Hamilton: Could you frame that comment?

Mr Attwood: I said to John Dallat recently that if there were 10 John Dallats in the SDLP, we would be a much more efficient organisation. I believe that if there were more minds like Mr Allister's in the Chamber, even though he goes off on these flights of fancy, the Chamber would be much more efficient at interrogating legislation. I say that very cautiously, Mr Wells. However, everybody brings something to the table here, and Mr Allister brings a forensic mind, even though, in my view, it ends up with him going down some dead ends.

He was right to raise all the legal points that he did. He is right to seek answers and he will get answers. He is having the conversation with me, but he is also having the conversation with the Attorney General and the Departmental Solicitor's Office, and Mr Allister knows that there will be a battle of legal minds to get rebuttal, answers or adjustments to the questions that were rightly raised. On that point, I will ask my officials to scope out the Hansard report and to write to the Committee on all the issues and points that I do not address today. Given my performance on questions for written answer, it may not be feasible for me to write to everyone on every point that was made. However, we will capture all the points, collate them and reply to the Committee on all the matters raised.

I do not intend to deal with all the points that Mr Allister raised in his analysis of the Bill. However, there was an inconsistency, and subject to my reading of the Hansard report, I think that he may have misread clause 9(3) of the Bill, which states:

"Subsection (4) applies if the court is satisfied as to any of the following—

(a) that a relevant document is to any extent outside the appropriate powers;

(b) that the interests of the applicant have been substantially prejudiced".

It is not, as Mr Allister said, that subsection 4 will apply if the court is satisfied with both conditions. It will apply if the court is satisfied with any of the conditions.

I will turn to some of Mr Allister's more substantive points, and he made a good point about the exception in clause 32(5), namely the power of the Department to amend that section:

"so as to remove, or restrict the application of, the defence".

In my view, that defence was primarily a sea fishing defence. I am advised that the answer to his question — it is subject to my further interrogation — is that the sea fishing defence largely relates to controlled fishing practices. Given that those practices change, not least because of the common fisheries policy and the adjustments that might be sought therein by the European Union, the power to amend is necessary. However, that power is, at all times, subject to the oversight of the Assembly, because it is subject to the affirmative resolution of the Assembly. There appears to be

a prima facie tension in the legislation, in that it creates what seems to be a hybrid defence of having reasonable cause and proving it beyond the balance of probabilities — I will check that one out as well — but also provides for the Department to amend or remove that defence. So Mr Allister asked a fair question, but my answer at the moment is that the changing nature of European law and practice when it comes to the common fisheries policy led to clause 32(5) as drafted. I will come back to each and all of the matters raised by the Member in due course. I may also come back to Mr Allister in due course, but I will see about that.

I want to turn to some of the points raised by other Members. Mr Hamilton was worried, and rightly so, that we were stepping — as he put it — into the unknown and that we could end up being overzealous with the number of MCZs and the scale of protection that they afford. I think that that was essentially his point. There are a number of good answers to those concerns. As we know, the first MCZ will probably be designated at Strangford lough within a year of the passing of the legislation. That tells the tale that MCZs will borrow from current designations and will, if you like, escalate to MCZ designation. There should not be any threat in that, and it should be confirmatory in character and create certainty. In the fullness of time and because of how we manage Strangford lough, some other controls may be required, and the outcome of the modiolus issue may lead to that conclusion. However, the point is that areas likely to be subject to MCZs are already subject to habitats and birds directives.

5.00 pm

There are a lot of other reasons why the concern identified by Mr Hamilton may not prevail. First, the science around all this is systematic and demanding. The survey evidence that is undertaken by the Department is not just survey evidence that we have undertaken by ourselves; it is informed by a lot of other reports, including reports from AFBI and DETI, the State of the Seas report, reports on habitats directive monitoring and the Northern Ireland UK marine science study. All that evidence is not arbitrary; it is evidence-based and has had full interrogation and very careful assessment. Only then do we get to the point at which designations arise and at which MCZs, in particular, will complement the existing site protection measures for European marine sites. They are not, to borrow a phrase from Mr McGlone, a fishing management tool. That is not the purpose of the MCZs. Nor, indeed, is it the purpose of other designations in the marine. Their purpose is not to impinge on the objectives of the common fisheries policy. However, as we know from modiolus, we have some challenging choices to make. It may be that we will choose to act in a way that may reconfigure the fishing industry in that part of the world for other reasons, but MCZs will not drive a coach and horses through the heart of the fishing industry and other commercial marine activities.

Mr Hamilton also raised the issue of the tension between energy and wave power and said that we had to get the balance right. Mr Agnew also touched on all of that. I confirm that, as far as I know, the Professor Attwood to whom he referred is not related to me, but it does confirm that the Attwood clan's reach is international, and is all the better for it. He probably spells his name with one t.

Mr Hamilton: He spells it with two t's.

Mr Attwood: Is it two t's? Then he is from the plebeian part of the family.

I make it clear that the opportunities that we will have to sell marine renewable technology on one hand and exploit it on the other will be very challenging and exciting, and Mr Hamilton captured that. However, it is about more than that. Not only will science soon confirm that we have opportunities for tidal and wave power and onshore and offshore wind, but evidence will begin to emerge of opportunities for geothermal activity in this part of the world. I am not talking simply of opportunities that may or may not exist in Ballymena or Ballymoney, where some testing may be going on; geothermal energy will be an opportunity in the future.

The point of it all is that, unless we actively manage, there will be active risks. That is why, when it came to the potential for fracking in Fermanagh, I called Tamboran in two weeks ago to have a conversation and to remind it that it was not to create press headlines without acknowledging the interests of the community down there on the one hand and the interests of government on the other, not just on the DETI side but also on the side of DOE, which, ultimately, will be responsible for the environmental and planning issues surrounding any Tamboran exploration or future drilling. We need to manage all those issues, which means managing marine wind opportunities. That is why I have instructed officials that, whatever about the content of the Bill, we need to have an active management process up to and on the far side of the granting of any licences that might emerge out of the current round of issues.

Finally, I will confirm for Mr Hamilton that there will be various levels of protection. This is not going to be a one-size-fits-all approach. There will be light-touch MCZ management or management of the marine, and there will be a heavy touch where the evidence and science confirms that that should be the case.

I also endorse what Mr Agnew said in reply to Mr Boylan's comment about balancing economic and environmental concerns. Although there are times when the economic imperative can be too dominant in respect of planning policy — I refer to my suppression of PPS 24 in that regard — I also want to make it clear that you can get the balance right. In respect of article 31 approaches, you can reconcile the environmental and the economic; Runkerry is a good example.

I confirm what I said earlier when not all Members may have been in the House. The costs of the marine plan are anticipated to be in and around £2 million, perhaps £1.9 million, with an annual cost after the first four or five years of £200,000. That is a separate cost from any potential costs around the MMO, which I referred to earlier.

I welcome Danny Kinahan's comments. He said that this was phenomenally important. Sometimes, I in particular cannot see the wood for the trees but, for the reasons that I outlined earlier, the legislation is phenomenally important, especially if it is enhanced by an MMO and demonstration marine zones, which is another clause that I am minded to put in the Bill and which, I think, the Executive will be minded to agree to. We have a great asset with the marine, and we can better manage it. It can become part of what the North of Ireland represents: green and clean protection of our built, natural, archaeological and marine life. That is very important.

The Member raised a number of very good points. He said that the previous Committee endorsed an MMO, and he raised the issue of having an independent advisory committee. There may well be an argument there. There are a lot of independent advisory structures around the Department on the built and natural heritage side, and there is a lot of input into the Department from the marine stakeholder forum, the marine task force and various others. You may have a point that that should be built into the body of the Bill so that, on the far side of the legislation, that becomes more relevant.

I acknowledge the point that the Member made on costs, particularly on the issue around specialists. On a related issue, the second survey of built properties, in which Mr Kinahan will have a particular interest, was in some jeopardy during this financial year because of a lack of money. The second survey, which scopes out our built heritage to determine what is to be listed or delisted and what should stay listed, is an important piece of the function of DOE and the economic development of the North of Ireland. That costs money, and, although we are able to put more money into it, the wider point is on what the specialist cost will be in terms of marine plan and MCZs. You may well be right that the costs of that will be higher than any of us anticipate.

I welcome John Dallat's welcome of the Bill. I am of a generation that remembers the guinea, the thruppence and the sixpence, as you will, unlike some of our colleagues. His comment about his experience of talking to someone who had knowledge of the extraterrestrial, if you like, captured, in a human and personal way, what we are trying to do through the Bill. As he said, it is important that future generations will be grateful to this packed House even if, sometimes, we cannot understand the full impact of what we are doing.

As I said, Peter Weir made a useful speech. He said that there are significant details to get right on balance protection, but, whether he meant it or not, he seemed to draw the conclusion that an MMO was a useful way to go.

I wish Willie Clarke the best of luck in his future political career after he leaves us in three weeks' time. My party colleague Margaret Ritchie will be leaving us in three weeks' time as well, and I wish her all the best going forward. I note what Mr Clarke said.

Mr Nesbitt, who has now left us, rightly made the point that his welcome of BMAP a number of years ago was a little premature. However, he made the telling point that five Departments have an interest in the marine and that it is a difficult undertaking to manage and reconcile all the issues in a horizontal rather than a vertical way. Whether my Executive colleagues concur with me or not about a marine management organisation, horizontal management of the marine will be an essential standard. Continuing to have vertical management of issues of the marine or of wider important public policy matters will defeat good government and the wider interests of the North. I also welcome his comments about renewables and the argument for a renewables corridor. That is absolutely spot on, and we should work towards it.

I have not touched on many of the points that were made by Mr Boylan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Storey, Mr Kinahan and others. I will respond through the Committee to all those matters in the fullness of time. This is important legislation

that will redefine the character of what Northern Ireland represents in all its tourist offering and in its commitment to protecting the environment as part of the quality of our lives and because of our international and other obligations. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Second Stage of the Marine Bill [NIA 5/11-15] be agreed.

Executive Committee Business

High Hedges (Fee Transfer) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012

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

That the draft High Hedges (Fee Transfer) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.

As Members know, the regulations are made under section 4(4) of the High Hedges Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. The Act requires that the regulations be laid in draft and approved by resolution of the Assembly.

Public consultation on the draft regulations took place between 28 June and 20 September 2011, and 88 responses were received, the majority of which supported the principle that the hedge owner should bear the costs associated with investigating a high hedge complaint. The regulations implement the desire of the previous Assembly that the hedge owner rather than the complainant should bear the costs associated with high hedge complaints. If a complaint is made to the local council about a high hedge and the council decides that the hedge is acting as a barrier to light — I stress that it must act as a barrier to light — and meets the criteria of the High Hedges Act, it will issue a remedial notice requiring the height of the hedge to be reduced. When that notice takes effect at least 28 days after the issue date to allow time for any appeals to be lodged, the complainant will have any complaints fee refunded, and the council can then charge the hedge owner a fee to cover the administrative costs associated with investigating the complaint.

Councils have the discretion to set the level of the complaints fee up to a maximum of £360. They can also decide not to charge any fee or to offer reduced fees for certain groups of people. They also have the discretion to set the level of fee to levy on the hedge owner up to that maximum. In addition to the fee, the hedge owner will have to bear the costs associated with performing the remedial work and the ongoing maintenance to prevent the problem reoccurring. The remedial notice is registered as a statutory charge on the land, so that future owners will be aware of their responsibilities to maintain the hedge. I ask the Assembly to approve the regulations.

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): The issue of fees for high hedges disputes was heavily debated by the previous Environment Committee when taking the High Hedges Bill through Committee Stage. The arguments for councils charging the fee for the service were varied. On one hand, some felt that it was only right that someone making a complaint should have to pay for work that the council would do on their behalf. That would encourage parties to sort out their high hedge problem before going to the council, help to deter malicious complaints and avoid the majority of ratepayers paying for a service from which they would not benefit. However, some councils told the Committee that they did not want to charge for the service because they do not charge for their other environmental services and the charge would contradict that principle. As a result, the Committee was content that the legislation should allow councils to choose whether or not to charge a fee and how much that fee should be. Its one proviso was that there should be an upper limit on how much a council could charge. That was because

the Committee had seen evidence of the prohibitive fees charged by councils in other jurisdictions. Legislation capping the fee has now been laid and is welcomed by the Committee.

5.15 pm

Members also took the view that complainants should not have to bear the cost of making a complaint if that complaint is subsequently found to be valid. Members felt that that would be unfair and would go against the widely accepted principle that innocent parties should not be out of pocket. It would also contradict the “polluter pays” principle. The Committee felt strongly that the cost of the complaint should be borne by the hedge owner if a complaint is upheld, so it recommended that, if a council charges a fee for providing a high hedge complaint service, it should be required to refund that fee for successful complaints. That would also ensure that a complaint fee would not deter someone from complaining if genuinely troubled by a high hedge. However, members recognised that that would place the burden on all ratepayers for a service that only a fraction of them were likely to use, so the Committee also recommended that the Bill should be amended to make provision for a complaint fee to be passed to the hedge owner in the event of a complaint being upheld. That is more or less what the statutory rule we are considering today does. It does not compel councils to recoup money from hedge owners, but it gives them the opportunity to do so should they wish. Members recognise that, although not quite what was originally envisaged, that flexibility will be useful when a council wants to exercise discretion or concessions for hedge owners where appropriate.

On balance, therefore, the Committee is content that the draft rule supports the principle that the innocent party in any high hedge dispute should not end up paying the fee. It should also encourage high hedge owners to sort their problems out with their neighbours long before the issue is taken to council. Prevention rather than cure was always the overall intention or aspiration of the High Hedges Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. The Committee considered the draft rule at its meeting on 23 February, and members were content for me to recommend to the Assembly that it be affirmed.

Mr Weir: As someone who was on the Committee at the time of the high hedges legislation, I very much welcome the regulations before us today. By way of background, this provides a final piece of the jigsaw of the high hedges legislation. There has, understandably, been a degree of frustration or at least a lack of knowledge among some members of the public in relation to the legislation. Because of the complexity of it, it was always going to need some subordinate legislation to make it workable. There is, naturally, a misunderstanding among the public that, once they see a particular piece of legislation, it immediately comes into effect. That was never going to be the case with this legislation because it was important that the regulations were got right.

There has been frustration, in part because the corresponding legislation, particularly in England, went through a number of years ago. However, this is a good example of how devolution works, in that the Assembly has been able to scrutinise the legislation. In England, mistakes were made with the fees set-up. We have taken the time to learn from those mistakes and make sure that we have a fees system

that is, hopefully, much more fit for purpose than what exists in England. One of the problems, as mentioned by the Chair of the Committee, was that there are wildly differing fees across England and no maximum amount has been put in place. In the jigsaw that we have constructed around high hedges, it is right that a cap is put on that, so that, going from one jurisdiction to the next, people will not see wildly differing costs in connection with it. Fees are something that Committee members pressed very strongly on. Effectively, I suppose, the regulations come largely from a Committee amendment, which, to be fair, the then Minister very readily accepted.

Mention has been made of the “polluter pays” principle. Very much allied to that and the thinking behind it is what would happen in a legal case. I am sure that the Minister will be very familiar with this, given his background. Essentially, fees or costs follow the event. There was one initial weakness in the legislation which these regulations change. Clearly, there was a need for a certain level of fee because this should not be something that is simply entered into lightly or, as was indicated, something vexatious. In an ideal world, there would be no need for the legislation at all. If people acted as good neighbours, in 99% of cases things would be resolved before getting to this stage. Unfortunately, we do not live in the sort of world in which everybody is as neighbourly and altruistic as that, so there was a feeling that a fee should be attached. Therefore, for example, if an applicant was shown to be in the wrong or vexatious, they should pick up the tab. That is the perfectly correct way to do it.

The other guiding principle enshrined in the regulations is that this should not be a general cost to the ratepayer. If the legislation is designed to solve neighbourhood disputes, the cost should not impact on the wider public. So, it was right to have a provision that, if somebody made a complaint and that complaint was not upheld, they would be responsible for the fee connected to the complaint. However, until changes were made to the legislation, the flip side was not the case. If someone made a complaint and was shown to be completely in the right and remedial action was ordered, they would still be left with the cost. Therefore, the regulations now cover the situation in which, previously, someone making an utterly vexatious complaint, possibly even motivated by a degree of malice, and somebody making a very genuine complaint having suffered for a number of years because of high hedges would be left in the same position. This passes the burden to whomever is found to be responsible, whether that is the applicant in the wrong or the hedge owner who failed to take the opportunity to take their own remedial action.

There is flexibility in the regulations so that there can be some discretion for a council. If the council feels that remedial action is needed but, for some reason — financial or whatever — that it would be unfair or unjust to pass the bill on to the hedge owner, the council has an opportunity to bear the cost in those exceptional circumstances. The regulations provide balance and take a reasonable approach, so that the innocent party is, at all times, protected. They will also, effectively, cover ratepayers and ensure that they are protected. Taking the regulations on board is the last piece of the jigsaw and, as I understand it, will mean that the legislation itself will be able to be in full effect from 31 March and, consequently, it will be welcomed.

Looking at the issue from the outside, some people may sneer and question whether high hedges are really a major problem. For a lot of people, high hedges are the key problem in their life. It is very irritating for a small number of people. One purpose of today's legislation and the wider high hedges legislation is to act as a deterrent to bad behaviour. It will hopefully lead to disputes being solved at an early stage because there will be an opportunity now for later intervention. Hopefully, it will mean that a more neighbourly stance will be adopted by more and more people. We now have statutory protection for people, and that will have effect from the end of this month. I welcome very strongly the regulations in front of us today.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the legislation. It generated a lot of debate, and it took people a long time to articulate their points. It is a small piece of legislation, but it will be very effective. It gives councils a wee mechanism to deal with issues that cannot be resolved through mediation, but I hope that councils do everything in their power to go down the mediation road before they decide to use this tool. It has highlighted one thing. In the previous debate, we talked about consultation and participation. As we went through the legislation, we received many consultative responses from local authorities and councils. However, when we went to introduce the legislation, we found that some councils were not keen to use it. That is just right. We have created a little mechanism for councils to use. I encourage Members who are still on a council to try mediation first before they use the regulations.

Mr Kinahan: I will be brief. The Ulster Unionist Party welcomes the transfer mechanism. As the legislation went through the Committee, I was amazed as what I thought was a simple Bill became more and more complicated. However, as we consulted, it was absolutely right that it became more complex. The solutions that we came up with, including the solution today, are right. As an example, there is a hedge in Crumlin that is 25 feet high and stretches the whole length of a lady's garden. It means that she gets no light at any time of day and cannot put a satellite dish in her garden. Despite having knocked on the door of the home next door and having written to the owner, I cannot get any acknowledgement. That is one person whom the legislation will help. In Templepatrick, a builder was next to five or six houses. Once he was written to and pushed, he cut down the hedge. We are getting through, and mediation is the right way forward.

We were absolutely right to put a cap on the fees. We must keep pushing to make sure that everyone tries to resolve things before they get to that point. The legislation is fair, and it leaves councils room for discretion. My only concern is where we have someone who is elderly and cannot cut their hedge or does not have the money. I hope that councils will use their discretion in that regard.

I have one little story from my days on Antrim Borough Council that concerns me. To get a £75 litter fine paid, it would cost the council £800 to go to court. We want to push for mediation, but we do not want it to cost councils or ratepayers too much. Good work was done by the Committee, and I support the change.

Mr Dallat: Like my colleagues, I welcome the progress that has been made. I look forward to the regulations. The

legislation will be welcomed by many people, particularly those who do not see the light of day because their contact with the outside world has been blanked out by leylandii and Castlewella Golds. I have no grudge against people in County Down.

That is not to say, of course, as was mentioned by others, that this is the panacea for all problems relating to high hedges. It most certainly is not. Nevertheless, it is a sound basis for addressing an issue that has bedevilled society for many years, particularly in urban areas and housing estates, but not exclusively so. We have rows in rural areas as well about high hedges. I know that people will be looking forward to this legislation as an opportunity to have restored to them God's gift of light.

5.30 pm

I think that it was pointed out by other Members that the legislation is not a substitute for common sense, compromise and an ability to reach agreement. In many cases, and, hopefully, in most, I suspect that that will remain the way forward. I am sure that local councillors will not look forward to an avalanche of complaints about high hedges. I am saying that the regulations are not a panacea and will not end all the problems, and I am quite sure that few high hedges will be shaking in their roots for fear of being turned into totem poles. The message is that that will not happen.

At this stage, it is important to express our thanks to the people who gave evidence to the Committee, particularly councillors and officials who gave up their time to come along. I think that it was worthwhile because I believe that it influenced the legislation and made it more practical. Initially, I was concerned that we had simply plucked the legislation from Britain, and you know how I feel about that. However, I now think that it has been properly tailored to suit our particular needs in Northern Ireland, so I welcome it.

Lord Morrow: I welcome the fact that we have got to where we are with the Bill. As someone who has been on the Environment Committee since the May election, I was under the illusion that the Bill was further advanced. I understand and am delighted that — I hope that I do not misquote — the Bill will be in force on 31 March. I suspect that it is fortuitous that it was decided not to implement it on 1 April, because that may have sent out altogether the wrong message.

I also welcome that Members around the House said that the Bill is probably not the best way to resolve things. The best way to resolve things is still by negotiation. I have experience of being involved in resolving an issue concerning a set of trees that extended skywards to a height of 80 to 100 feet. I was able to get those trees reduced to something like 10 to 15 feet, and I met neither the complainant nor the person who owned them. Rather, we were able to do it via telephone calls and e-mail. That demonstrates clearly that the way forward remains through negotiations.

However, as Peter Weir said, we do not live in an ideal world in which everybody sits down and negotiates. If that were the case, we would not need the Bill at all. If Hardy comes to Hardy and legislation must be used, it will be the polluter who pays. It would have been an injustice, a travesty, if, in the case of a genuine concern and complaint, the person who caused the pollution got away, yet the complainant could not move, or when they did, they would be landed with

a considerable bill. There was an injustice there, and I am pleased that that will not be the case.

The legislation is good, if we have to use it, and I trust that we will not. However, there will sometimes be no other way. As Mr Dallat said, the Bill is not the panacea to all our problems. High hedges are an issue that must be dealt with and one that is causing considerable concern to a considerable number of people. There are people in society, not least in the legal profession, who are waiting patiently for the legislation because there does not appear to be any other way forward. They have no other means of exerting influence or getting the job done, but I again emphasise that we did not need any legal wizards around the table in the two cases that I was involved in. We did not need any legislation, just common sense. I hope that I was able to mediate between the two to get the desired result, and both parties surprised —

Ms S Ramsey: No reflection on the legal system.

Lord Morrow: No. We will not bring the legal system into it at all. At the end of the day, both parties were happy.

Therefore, on those couple of occasions, without all the paraphernalia of legislation, we did not need solicitors, lawyers, QCs and all the eminent people who bring so much to society. I hope that we will not need them in future and that the threat of legislation might be enough to get the desired result. I welcome the fact that the regulations are at this stage. I look forward to waking up on 1 April when, lo and behold, there will be legislation that nobody will make a fool of.

Mr Attwood: I thank all Members who contributed to the debate. I will reply to a number of issues that Members raised, starting with Lord Morrow. After the legislation was passed, there was a requirement for a further period of consultation because the possibility of transferring a complaints fee to a hedge owner, which was a late Committee amendment, had not been subject to public consultation during the development of the primary legislation. Moreover, there was a need to ensure that given that the legislation goes live in three weeks' time on 31 March, council officers were trained in the management of the new legislation. As Mr Kinahan said, a simple idea can escalate and become quite complex, as his colleague John McCallister knows from the passage of the Caravans Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

The complexity of the High Hedges Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 — the height to which trees can be cut back, the legislation not extending to trees around commercial properties, and so on — required significant training. Councils need to be fully aware of the intention and practice of the new law to ensure that public expectations are fulfilled. Given the further consultation and the training, 31 March was the earliest that the legislation could go live. As Lord Morrow and others said, it is good law if we have to use it. However, I would like to think that people will resolve such matters, although it is sometimes hard to do so because they are often embedded in the neighbourhood and are a surrogate for wider issues. On the far side of 31 March, it will be expected that anybody who wants to bring forward a complaint will make one final significant attempt to resolve the source of the complaint before lodging it with a council.

I confirm the Chairperson of the Environment Committee's comment that a maximum fee of £360 has been laid down

to cover administration costs. In Britain, fees vary between zero and £600, the average being £340. On this occasion, a judgement was made to decide on a figure of £360 to cover some council administration costs. Councils have complained that although they are getting new powers, they are not getting new resources. That situation will not change. Following on from what a Sinn Féin Member said earlier, I hope that the fact that new resources have not followed new powers does not lead to impediments to the new law being enforced after 31 March. There will be a public expectation. We expect a stream of complaints and, during the first year of operation, that there will be 30 appeals arising from council decisions. Based on evidence from Britain, that is the scale of what we are talking about, which would be the worst outcome. I appeal to council leaderships, chief executives and other staff to ensure that the legislation is available to complainants after a significant effort has been made to resolve their ongoing dispute.

The councils do not have to charge £360. They have discretion to reduce the fee and, as Members have indicated, the fee will be refunded to the complainant after a remedial notice has been determined by the council. All of that should lead to reducing the risk of vexatious complaints on the one hand and good outcomes, in the event that the law is required, on the other.

Let me acknowledge that Peter Weir said that this is a useful piece of legislation borrowing from the experience of other jurisdictions. Consequently, our model seems to be proportionate and workable, hopefully not relied on in excess, but relied on when no other remedy exists.

I also acknowledge the work of the Committee. A useful amendment came late in the passage of the Bill, and it created a Bill that was more balanced, more in the interests of the complainant and less in the interests of the offender. That seems to me to be a good and wise outcome, and I commend the order to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the draft High Hedges (Fee Transfer) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.

Public Bodies (Abolition of the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts) Order 2012

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I beg to move

That this Assembly consents to the Public Bodies (Abolition of the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts) Order 2012 in the form of the draft laid before the UK Parliament on 19 January 2012.

The motion seeks the consent of the Assembly to the abolition of the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts — or NESTA, as it is more commonly known — as a non-departmental public body and its reconstitution as a charity. The consent of the Assembly, and likewise that of the Scottish Parliament, is required for the necessary legislation under the Public Bodies Act 2011 to progress through Westminster and to come into effect on 1 April 2012.

The proposal to abolish NESTA and to reconstitute it as a charity is not new. Members may recall that, last March, the Assembly gave its consent to the Public Bodies Act 2011, which granted UK Ministers the authority to abolish, merge or transfer the functions of public bodies. NESTA was listed in the Act as one of the public bodies whose status could be altered. Section 9 of the Public Bodies Act 2011 requires, where appropriate, the consent of the devolved Administrations. As matters relating to improving science, innovation, technology and the arts are transferred matters, the UK Government have requested the formal consent of the Assembly to their proposal.

Briefly, by way of background, NESTA is a non-departmental public body of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), with a remit to support and to promote talent, innovation and creativity in the fields of science, technology and the arts. It promotes innovation and creativity to help to tackle social and economic problems, and provides an independent, well-informed voice and commentary on innovation policy.

In recent years, NESTA has focused on supporting and promoting talent, innovation and creativity by developing models of innovation for the wider public benefit. It achieves those objectives by running practical experiments and commissioning policy and research work for wider dissemination and adoption by policymakers. NESTA's portfolio of projects changes from year to year, as it experiments and adapts to changing societal and economic challenges. Its current strategy is focused on the role of innovation in three main areas, namely delivering more effective public services; the creative economy; and improving economic growth in the UK. NESTA has always operated with a high degree of independence from government. Its programmes and strategies are determined by its trustees and it is funded by the return on its National Lottery endowment, which is currently valued at £321 million. As a part of the public bodies reform programme, the UK Government announced in October 2010 that they would seek to establish NESTA as an independent charity, with the National Lottery endowment held in a separate charitable trust.

5.45 pm

In assessing NESTA's future in the context of wider government reform of public bodies, BIS considered the following options: the abolition of NESTA; its merger with another body; the transfer of its functions to a private sector organisation; and its reconstitution as a charity.

The option of abolishing NESTA and returning the estimated £321 million endowment to the National Lottery distribution fund for redistribution was rejected, as there is no other suitable body to perform NESTA's functions. As a result, NESTA's valuable programmes for wider public benefit would cease and the public investment in NESTA via the National Lottery distribution fund would be lost.

Consideration was also given to merging NESTA with another body that carries out similar functions or operations in a similar policy area. That option might have enabled NESTA to enhance its impact by providing a wider array of stakeholders and opportunities for future programmes and could also have included efficiencies and savings for sharing accommodation and back-office costs. However, that option was rejected by BIS, as there is no comparable organisation with which NESTA could merge without considerably altering its direction, brand, mission and, indeed, activities.

The third option — reconstitution of NESTA as a private sector body — was also examined. That would have involved NESTA's being transferred to another type of body, either a company limited by guarantee or a company incorporated by Royal charter. That option was also rejected by BIS, as the need for suitable controls to ensure propriety of expenditure of the endowment is at odds with ensuring that the level of government control does not cause the new body to be classified as public sector.

Therefore, the option to reconstitute NESTA as a charitable trust was selected. Becoming a charity will provide protection of the endowment and enable NESTA to continue its work while enhancing its independence from government.

In consulting on its proposal to reconstitute NESTA as a charity, BIS initiated a six-week consultation in October 2011. The consultation document was circulated by my Department to key stakeholders in Northern Ireland, including the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, as well as being made available on the Department for Enterprise, Trade and Investment website. I also advised the Committee that subject to the outcome of the consultation exercise, it was my intention to support the BIS proposal to reconstitute NESTA as a charity. No responses were received by my Department or by BIS from Northern Ireland stakeholders. The responses that BIS received from other parts of the UK did, however, indicate strong support for NESTA to be reconstituted as a charitable organisation.

It is worth noting that NESTA's running costs are covered by interest earned on its endowment from the National Lottery and by returns from its portfolios of investments in innovative SMEs. I can also confirm that there will be no costs arising for Northern Ireland from the change in NESTA's status.

With regard to its role in Northern Ireland, its research on innovation has proven to be a valuable resource for my Department. It has published a number of important reports, such as 'Stepping Forwards', as well as developing a UK

innovation index. That index, which has been adopted by BIS and the OECD, measures wider investment in innovation beyond research and development, for example in skills and design, and demonstrates the importance of those investments in driving economic growth. My Department is working with NESTA to develop a Northern Ireland version of the innovation index, which will give us a clearer picture of where investment needs to be made to support companies to be more innovative.

NESTA also provides equity investment in innovative SMEs. I am pleased to say that it is now a member of HALO, the business angel network based at the science park. To increase its involvement in Northern Ireland, NESTA is also seeking to forge relationships with organisations here to identify areas for joint working. As part of that work, it will be undertaking a Northern Ireland roadshow this summer to showcase its work. That is part of a UK-wide initiative, and my officials will be working closely with NESTA in developing that event.

Parallel to that, the Department is exploring with NESTA the possibility of co-funding hyperlocal media projects in Northern Ireland. Hyperlocal media is a UK-wide project in which NESTA is seeking to work in partnership with other funding agencies to explore viable business models to support citizenship and local communities. Workshops in Northern Ireland are part of the schedule of activity for that project.

I hope that you can tell from what I have said that I am very keen that we build on the work that NESTA has already undertaken in Northern Ireland. I want to see more companies and organisations involved with its projects. I plan to meet Geoff Mulgan, chief executive of NESTA, about that very issue.

The proposed change in NESTA's status will have no detrimental impact on Northern Ireland. Indeed, I believe that it provides us with an opportunity to strengthen our ties and to build on the work that NESTA is doing on the very important issue of innovation, which is raised many times by Members across the Chamber. Therefore, I am happy to support the change in NESTA's status and recommend that the Assembly consents to the motion.

Mr A Maginness (The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I thank the Minister for her detailed and comprehensive outline of the proposed changes. The Minister wrote to me, as Chair of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, on 9 February to inform the Committee that the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills would be seeking the consent of the Northern Ireland Assembly for the abolition of NESTA by way of the Public Bodies (Abolition of the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts) Order 2012.

The Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment considered the proposals at its meeting of 23 February 2012. The Minister informed the Committee that the order is intended to abolish NESTA on 1 April 2012. At the same time, a transfer scheme will be made, transferring all property, rights and liabilities of NESTA to a charity. We heard from the Minister in that regard today. The Committee was assured that the transfer will have no material impact on NESTA's work or its link with Northern Ireland, and that is to be welcomed.

The Committee is aware that a Minister can abolish a body only if by doing so it improves the exercise of public functions, having regard to efficiency, effectiveness, economy and securing appropriate accountability to Ministers. Responses to the consultation were supportive and many welcomed the fact that NESTA will have more independence from government. However, the Committee noted that the consultation received no submissions from Northern Ireland.

The Committee welcomed an assurance from the Minister that the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is actively working to increase NESTA's visibility here and to ensure, where possible, that Northern Ireland is included in all NESTA's research exercises. That, too, is to be welcomed.

As the transfer will have no material impact on NESTA's work or its link with Northern Ireland, the Committee is content with the proposals. Therefore, I support the motion.

Mr Moutray: The National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts is an executive non-departmental public body established by an Act of Parliament in 1998. NESTA's remit has been to promote innovation, talent and creativity in science, technology and the arts. It has funded programmes from the National Lottery.

The Government at Westminster have considered NESTA's future as part of a wider public bodies' reform programme, which has a commitment to reduce the number and cost of quangos. The Westminster Government believe that NESTA performs a valuable function and want its activities to continue. However, they do not consider it necessary for NESTA to remain a non-departmental public body or to be part of the public sector in order to carry out its functions but rather to be established as a charity with a charitable trust to hold the National Lottery endowment.

A consultation showed support for the proposals. I am encouraged by the Minister's remarks about building on the work of NESTA in Northern Ireland. I support the change in NESTA's status and, consequently, support the motion.

Mrs Overend: The Ulster Unionist Party supports the move of the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts from a non-departmental public body to being reconstituted as a charitable organisation.

I wish to make two points on this subject. First, I have researched the work of NESTA, and there have been numerous useful and innovative research programmes carried out over the lifetime of the organisation. However, it seems that a limited amount of work was carried out in Northern Ireland. That is an area that NESTA is keen to improve on, and I urge it to do so. I thank the Minister for her commitment to work to ensure that Northern Ireland is included in all its research exercises.

Secondly, NESTA's mission is to make the UK more innovative. That is hugely relevant today, and we should encourage that in Northern Ireland through numerous ways and means. I believe that the reconstitution may enhance NESTA's ability to invest in more high-risk projects, which is necessary to encourage entrepreneurial innovation and to work with groups or in programmes that may not be in the more traditional industries but that use new technology, such as gaming and music, etc. I support the motion.

Mrs Foster: I thank the Members who contributed to this short debate. It is a non-controversial proposal, in that we are moving from NESTA being a non-departmental body to a charity. As Members have said, that will enhance the body's ability to be more proactive in the area that Mrs Overend mentioned in relation to angel investment, particularly investment in HALO funds.

NESTA has become more proactive in Northern Ireland over the past two years. Indeed, I have been involved in a number of projects that it has undertaken here. However, it is my hope that we will be able to develop its worth here and to work more closely with it. I thank Members for their support and hope that everyone across the Chamber will support the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly consents to the Public Bodies (Abolition of the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts) Order 2012 in the form of the draft laid before the UK Parliament on 19 January 2012.

Adjourned at 5.57 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 6 March 2012

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

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 a statement on the thirteenth North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) meeting in the health and food safety sectoral format, which took place in the NSMC joint secretariat offices in Armagh on Thursday 2 February 2012. Minister Michelle O'Neill MLA and I represented the Northern Ireland Executive. 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 on this occasion. This statement has been agreed with Minister O'Neill, and I make the statement on behalf of both of us.

Minister Reilly and I welcomed the signing of a memorandum of understanding between Ireland, Northern Ireland and the US National Cancer Institute in December 2011. The memorandum of understanding will enable the continuation for the next five years of joint programmes in cancer education, training, research and prevention. We also welcomed the launch by the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry and the National Cancer Registry of the 'All Ireland Cancer Atlas: 1995-2007' and the launch of the new All-Ireland Institute for Hospice and Palliative Care. The institute will deliver education, research and care services for people who are nearing the end of life with illnesses that include cancer. We noted the continuation of the US/Ireland R&D partnership and welcomed the participation of a high-level member of the US State Department as co-chair of its steering group.

Ministers welcomed the progress to date on arrangements for the radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin and noted that construction is planned to commence in 2013, with an operational date of 2016.

Ministers also noted the success of the North/South conference on alcohol misuse, which was held in Armagh on 26 January 2012. Over 130 delegates from many sectors attended the conference, which included informative presentations from local and international speakers. It was agreed that the two Health Departments would develop proposals on how joint work in that area could be taken forward in a more structured way, and consideration is being given to that. The Council also noted the development of strategies in both jurisdictions on alcohol and drug misuse and the continuing commitment of the Departments to share information and best practice to address those issues. We also noted the forthcoming publication of a 10-year

tobacco control strategy for Northern Ireland and noted that regulations to introduce text and photo warnings on tobacco products were introduced in Ireland in December 2011.

Joint progress on suicide prevention was also noted, including the National Office for Suicide Prevention and the Public Health Agency part funding an all-island project targeting the issue of suicide and young men.

Minister Fitzgerald and I jointly launched the inter-jurisdictional protocol for the transfer of child care cases between Northern Ireland and Ireland. The protocol will allow for the sharing of information between the statutory authorities in relation to children who are in care or are on the child protection register or those for whom there is a level of concern and who move between jurisdictions. The protocol will be made available to appropriate health and social care and health service executive staff and will be included on both departmental websites. The Council acknowledged the work undertaken by the five existing child protection subgroups, noted that the work of those subgroups was largely completed and that the cross-border steering group on child protection will bring forward a new work programme to the next NSMC health and food safety meeting.

Turning to the food safety sector, Ministers welcomed the recently appointed chairperson of Safefood, Ms Lynn Ní Bhaoghealláin, to her first NSMC meeting. Ministers received a progress report on the activities of Safefood, including scientific and promotional activities and the results of the market research on the initial phase of the Stop the Spread obesity and excess weight campaign. The progress report also provided an update on a research report on food poverty funded by Safefood. The Council discussed the main priorities for Safefood in 2012 and reviewed progress in finalising its business plan and budget. Although Dr Reilly and I indicated the necessity of constraint on the budget for Safefood, we assured the meeting of our ongoing support for the statutory role of the body now and for the foreseeable future. Ministers welcomed a presentation by Dr Gary Kearney from Safefood on the work of knowledge networks. The networks will help facilitate greater knowledge sharing by those involved in all parts of the food chain to support and enhance food safety with an overall aim of ensuring that consumers can continue to have confidence in the food that they eat.

The Council noted recommendations from the St Andrews Agreement review concerning the Food Safety Promotion Board (FSPB) referred by the November 2011 NSMC plenary meeting. The two Health Departments will now consult with the FSPB and bring forward proposals for consideration at the next NSMC health and food safety meeting. In addition,

Minister Reilly and I agreed to publish on each Department's website the North/South feasibility study, which was made available for viewing from 2 December 2011. It is important to recognise that the study was commissioned in a different economic landscape, and my Department and the health service now face serious budget pressures. However, I shall continue to support North/South projects where such developments deliver better outcomes for people and are cost-effective.

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 thank him for the briefing on it that he gave me and the Deputy Chairperson yesterday.

Last Thursday, the Health Committee held its first formal joint meeting with the health committee in Dublin, and a number of areas of co-operation came up, many of which have been covered in the statement. It is important to have that co-operation because, as you can see from the statement, there is progress on the whole issue of health, especially around border areas.

The issue of the radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin Hospital was raised. During the meeting, confirmation was given that the Irish Government are committed to the money that they set aside for the capital costs. However, there was nothing on the running costs. Therefore, it is important for you to give us an idea of where we are with the issue of running costs.

The issue of suicide also came up. It is important that the joint work in progress on suicide prevention is mentioned. However, you said that the progress was noted, including a number of issues on an all-island project targeting the issue of suicide and young men. Minister, I would appreciate it if you could give us more detail on that issue, if you have it available today. If not, I ask you to send it to me, as the matter came up during the meeting and is of interest to everyone who was at the meeting.

Mr Poots: The issue of capital costs at Altnagelvin is dealt with. Discussions are ongoing on the costs associated with its running and the contribution that should be made for people receiving care who are from the Republic of Ireland. I hope to bring that to a conclusion in a reasonable and sensible way. It is not a matter of cross-subsidisation; it is a matter of people paying their way. That is important in this instance and in other instances where people from the Republic of Ireland make use of our healthcare facilities. We are happy to give people care, but we do not want to subsidise that to the detriment of the people who elect us to this House.

In dealing with suicide, we obviously have the Protect Life strategy, which is being examined and updated. The latest figures for 2011 have not yet been updated, but the current rate of suicide is 15.4 deaths per 100,000 of the population. The target that we were looking at was 10.7 deaths per 100,000. Any death is unacceptable, but realistically, that target is not an unreasonable one to aim for. The rate of suicide has been rising over the past number of years. We need to arrest that rise, turn it around and challenge it. We need to get the right messages out to people and properly use resources, and those are all courses of work that we will do. Where there is common ground between what we do and what happens in the Republic

of Ireland, we need to see how best other people do things and evaluate that so that we can have the best possible response to the awful blight on our society that is suicide.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his statement today. What work is going on to address alcohol abuse through the North/South Ministerial Council?

Mr Poots: We had a very useful conversation on alcohol abuse. At the North/South conference in Armagh on 26 January 2012 Minister Shortall was very much of the view that she wants to press this forward in the Republic of Ireland. She recognises the problems of having cheap alcohol available and the abuse that takes place in homes and among families — young people abusing themselves — and the implications that it has for the health service, justice and society as a whole. That is now recognised by Ministers on both sides of the border.

Leadership is being given on the issue, and we are commissioning work that will help us establish all the facts that will allow us to move forward to legislate on the issue. We are keeping a close eye on what is happening in Scotland and are being regularly updated on that. Our officials work closely with our Scottish counterparts in the work that they are doing. I was glad to see that David Cameron has come on board over the past week. It would be good if the British Isles as a whole had a minimum price for alcohol and alcohol was not abused as it is currently, with the consequences that it has for society.

Mr McCallister: I welcome the Minister's statement. I would like to have heard more cast-iron guarantees from the Minister in answer to the Chair's question about the revenue costs associated with the centre at Altnagelvin. My party has always supported cross-border co-operation where it makes sense and there are obvious benefits for the populations in both jurisdictions. Will the Minister update us on any discussions he had with his opposite number about Daisy Hill Hospital in Newry?

10.45 am

Mr Poots: That was not part of the meeting. However, conversations continue at senior level in the Civil Service about what services are available at Daisy Hill Hospital, what is used by people from the Republic of Ireland and what potential there is for more people from the Republic of Ireland to use such services and for us to get the appropriate money for providing those services.

I have some concern, which is being raised with counterparts in the Republic of Ireland, that, for example, people are coming across and using the A&E facility. Of course, in the Republic of Ireland, you have to pay for a lot of this. You have to pay for your GPs and prescriptions. People who live on the border are taking advantage of the benefits that exist in the system that we have here. It is important that we are fully reimbursed for that. I feel that, at this moment, we are not getting full reimbursement. We get substantial reimbursement but not full reimbursement. It is not the role of this Executive to subsidise healthcare in the Republic of Ireland, and we need to ensure that that is not the case.

Mr Durkan: I welcome the Minister's statement and his continued recognition of the importance of North/South collaboration and his work in that regard. I was also at the meeting in Leinster House last week and was struck

by how much progress can be made through intensified collaboration. A problem shared is a problem halved, and we have quite a few problems on this island.

I welcome the confirmation regarding the capital commitment to the radiotherapy unit. I actually flagged it up —

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

Mr Durkan: — at the meeting on running costs. It is important that this tangible symbol of cross-border collaboration does not become a white elephant. Is the Minister confident that the unit will be able to attract necessarily qualified staff to maintain its running?

Mr Poots: I am very confident. Unfortunately, there is an oversupply of radiographers in Northern Ireland, many of whom are very keen to get work. We need to make better use of allied health professionals in general. They can create significant savings in the health service in providing early interventions and preventions.

We will proceed with establishing training for radiographers at an early point so that, come 2016, people will be ready to fulfil those roles and meet the requirement to have a first-class facility in the north-west.

Mr McCarthy: Like others, I welcome the statement. The Ministers received a progress report on the activities of Safefood and an update on the research report on food poverty. Will the Minister elaborate on the contents of that, given that we have recently been told about the enormous food wastage right across the country? What level of food poverty are we talking about?

Mr Poots: As regards Safefood, one of the concerns that we have about food and poverty is that many people who do not have a lot of income spend it on the wrong types of food. They very often go to supermarkets or pound shops and buy the wrong sort of food, which contributes to obesity and ill health. We need to encourage people to get back to basics. An awful lot of skills have been lost in the last two or three generations. As a consequence, people do not seem to know how to go to the local greengrocer and buy quality vegetables or how to buy some of the cheaper cuts of meat and prepare a nutritious dinner for their family. There needs to be work on training and educating our young people about how to provide quality food in the home. Unless we get that through to young people, we will be defeated. Such skills are not being passed on in the home any more, and therein lies the challenge.

Ms P Bradley: I also thank the Minister for today's statement, which is welcome. Like Mr McCarthy, I want to bring up the issue of Safefood in respect of obesity. As the Minister knows, over 20 Members took part in the Stop the Spread campaign. Some did better than others, and I will not say how I did. What plans does the Minister have to address the issue of obesity?

Mr Poots: The work of the obesity forum was externally evaluated. The evaluators found that all aspects of the forum were well managed over the past three years and that it provided updates, information and resources on obesity. The three components of the forum — closed meetings, workshops and the e-bulletin — all played a valid and complementary part in helping to address the objectives. It

has, therefore, been agreed that the forum will continue for a further three years.

The forum assists with identifying common areas for action in the obesity reduction policies of the two jurisdictions. It also facilitates the exchange of best practice, with most networking through half-yearly workshops on a range of topics that typically attract more than 100 participants. Workshop topics to date have included men's health, communication, physical activity and partnerships for tackling obesity in young people. A comprehensive e-bulletin, providing updates and links to relevant topics, is distributed to a wide range of professionals.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. I understand that the two Ministers are reviewing the work undertaken by Safefood and that there needs to be consensus on what its priorities should be. We are now in the third month of 2012, and yet you seem to be saying that Safefood's business plan and budget for 2012 have not yet been finalised. This is a matter of urgency for the organisation. It needs to be able to plan its work programme for the year. Can you give us some idea of when that business plan will be signed off?

Mr Poots: Minister Reilly and I certainly have some concerns about the fact that Safefood's work replicates that of other bodies. In constrained financial times, we cannot justify two organisations carrying out the same work. For example, Safefood was doing work on obesity even though the Public Health Agency was already doing work on that. Safefood is also straying into work that the FSA is carrying out. Given our really difficult financial circumstances, there is little value in paying twice to get the same job done. So, Minister Reilly and I agree that we need to review Safefood's work and identify whether there is a way forward that will allow it to continue to do good and effective work without duplication. It is logical that we do that.

Mr Gardiner: I also thank the Minister for his statement. Will he detail how many staff are employed by the Food Safety Promotion Board in total and how many are on each side of the border?

Mr Poots: I do not have those figures to hand, but I will make them available to the Member in writing.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his statement. Are there one or two dedicated officials in the Department who focus on liaising and dealing with Safefood? If that were the case, it would help to clarify the interests of the northern part of the Food Safety Promotion Board. I served on the board in the past, and I feel that it does worthwhile work. However, it needs to make sure that it is focused on what it has to do north and south.

Mr Poots: There are people in the Department who are in regular contact with representatives from Safefood. They identify what the Department's priorities are, and we give encouragement to Safefood in respect of its work. The bottom line is that ministerial agreement on such issues is required. At present, Minister Reilly and I seek a way forward that will ensure that any work done benefits both jurisdictions and will not mean that we pay more money for the same service.

Mr Allister: I wish to revert to the issue raised by Mr Gardiner. In 2011, the Minister's response to my question

was that Safefood employed 31 people, none of them in Northern Ireland. He also told me that the employees' community background was not monitored. In June 2011, the Minister said that he would ask for the community background of Safefood staff to be monitored. Did that happen? What was the outcome?

Mr Poots: My understanding is that there is a record of the monitoring that has taken place. We will seek to make it available if Members so wish.

Mr Campbell: I welcome the statement. The Minister referred to the radiotherapy unit, on which construction will commence in 2013. Is he in a position to outline roughly when in 2013 that construction will commence? Will he outline the benefits that would accrue to sufferers not only in Northern Ireland but in the Republic of Ireland if we, hopefully, were able to receive full payment for treatment offered to people in the Republic?

Mr Poots: The first element of the outline business case, OBC 1, is complete, allowing us to move ahead with commissioning enabling works and project support, which includes absolutely necessary consultancy work. We will move on to OBC 2, which is nearing completion, and we trust that it will be ready to come to the Department in the next few weeks.

The real benefit is that radiotherapy is a relatively short treatment. Often, someone who travels from Strabane or Londonderry, for example, has to travel for one and a half or two hours to get to Belfast for maybe 10 or 15 minutes of treatment. They then have to travel for one and a half or two hours to get back home. The unit will make this type of treatment very accessible to over 90% of the population in Northern Ireland. Therefore, it is a significant step forward. It will upgrade the standard of care for cancer sufferers. For all of us, moving forward on that project is a win-win situation.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. He acknowledged the work undertaken by the five child protection subgroups and said that the cross-border steering group will bring forward a new work programme. Will he give the House any further detail on what will be included in that forward work programme?

Mr Poots: The interjurisdictional protocol for the transfer of childcare cases is designed to promote and ensure best practice when children known to statutory social services move from one jurisdiction to the other. The protocol offers guidance to practitioners and managers working in statutory sector children's services in both jurisdictions on how cases should transfer from the responsibility of services in one jurisdiction to the other. The protocol builds on existing best practice and ensures a consistent approach to the transfer of all children who are in the care of a statutory authority in either jurisdiction and are considered to be in need or subject to procedures to safeguard and protect children. The protocol and its operation will be reviewed as part of our commitment to work on a cross-border basis to ensure that the most effective safeguarding of children and child protection arrangements are in place between the two jurisdictions. If, subsequently, any additions or amendments need to be made to the protocol to improve practice and outcomes for children, they can be made with the agreement of both Administrations.

Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland and Employer Engagement Plan

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a statement on the skills strategy for Northern Ireland and the launch of the associated employer engagement plan.

The draft economic strategy identifies skills as a crucial ingredient in rebalancing and rebuilding our economy.

Skills help economies to make the most of new opportunities in high-value-added activities; encourage greater investment and innovation; help businesses to compete in export markets; and, ultimately, support economic growth and enhance productivity. Skills are also critical for improving social inclusion.

11.00 am

My Department is working hand in hand with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and Invest Northern Ireland to make sure that we have the necessary skills to support our economic vision. Last year, I launched the skills strategy for Northern Ireland 'Success through Skills – Transforming Futures', and I was pleased that members of the Committee attended the launch. In December, it was a real honour to present an international example of best practice on skills at a major skills conference in Washington that was sponsored by the Atlantic Council and PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC). I am also delighted at the growing interest in our strategy in the European Union.

Our strategy considers the current skills base, examines the skills that we are likely to need in future to grow the Northern Ireland economy and highlights areas for action. Through the strategy, my Department plays, and will continue to play, a key role in raising the skills of the workforce to ensure that businesses have the people they need now and in future.

Skills are widely accepted as the key raw material in the modern, knowledge-based economy and are one of the main drivers in achieving our economic goals. Yet it is clear that our skill levels are generally too low. A large element of the current productivity gap between this region and other regions can be traced to skills deficits, and if Northern Ireland is to compete in a global economic arena, there must be a concerted effort, on all fronts, to drive up skills.

I am committed to the upskilling of our workforce and to addressing skills shortages and skills mismatches. We must ensure that our economy is working as efficiently as possible. Given, current levels of unemployment, skill shortages are particularly frustrating. It is of the utmost importance that we increase the number of people with higher-level skills, with management and leadership skills and with skills in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects. Those are all important issues for my Department that I am addressing. For example, the Made Not Born campaign continues to engage with businesses to highlight the importance of management and leadership skills and to raise awareness of the training programmes that we offer, such as management analysis and planning and the suite of provision under the management and leadership development programme.

Furthermore, the Success through STEM strategy has made much progress in the past year and will be showcased in the One Year On event that will be held in W5 on the 29 March. The way in which the business sector has worked with government to take forward that work has been crucial. Moreover, following consultation, the higher education strategy will be published in the coming months. That will set out the higher education sector's contribution to the objectives set out in 'Success through Skills – Transforming Futures'. Engagement with the business sector is critical in ensuring that the curriculum is up to date and relevant to the needs of industry. That follows on from similar work in the further education sector.

We cannot rely on the flow of young people into our workforce to change our skills profile: they simply cannot make up for the shortfall within the required timescales. About 80% of those who will make up the 2020 workforce are in the workplace having completed their mandatory education. We must do more to work with employers and encourage them to see how investing in the skills of their workforce can have a real impact on their businesses and the performance of our economy. In turn, we need to ensure that employers are aware of, and can easily access, the relevant departmental programmes and services. With that in mind, I have today launched an employer engagement plan, and I have made a copy of it available on my Department's website. That plan is key to achieving the ambitious goals set out in the skills strategy, and it focuses particularly on how my Department will engage with businesses over the coming years. It highlights a number of initiatives that will be of particular interest to employers and a selection of related projects.

The employer engagement plan sets out how I will make it easier for local businesses to articulate their skills needs to government and training providers; upskill their workforces; have the excellent training that they offer in-house accredited; have the existing skills of staff recognised; and better utilise those skills in their workforces. In doing so, the strategy will help to rebalance and rebuild the economy. It will also aspire to increase levels of productivity and social inclusion.

Overall, the employer engagement plan includes 20 projects and initiatives that will be delivered predominantly over the next 18 months. I will take the opportunity to outline several key examples of the projects and initiatives covered in the plan. The development of a skills delivery model for emerging sectors is a key project. A demand-led skills system is at the heart of the skills strategy and relies on timely and accurate information from employers and their representatives. To build on that supply of information, the Department will work with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to establish a foresight unit that will help to identify emerging sectors and their specific skill needs. The Careers Service will build on the existing industry fact sheets by examining ways in which that high-quality labour market information can be presented in a clear, accessible and useful way to all its users.

I often hear that employers are confused about how they can access training provision. I readily accept that that is an important issue, and it is one that I have been proactively addressing since becoming Minister. Building on its pilot phase, the Skills Solutions Service will help employers to understand and access training provision, which is available and is crucial to growing the skills that modern business

needs. Well-trained and knowledgeable skills solutions advisers are now available to meet any employer on a one-to-one basis anywhere in Northern Ireland, and they can dispel the complexity.

Therefore, I want to take this opportunity to encourage employers to contact my Department and make use of that free service to find out what support, financial and non-financial, is available to help them to develop the skills of their workforce. To help to raise the skills levels of people in the workplace and establish clear progression routes, the Department will work with a number of leading companies, training organisations and sector skills councils to develop and pilot a higher level apprenticeship in ICT and engineering. I am also committed to increasing the number of learners studying full-time or part-time for foundation degrees.

As part of the employer engagement plan, my Department will design and pilot two management and leadership development intervention models for microbusiness across a range of sectors with a view to offering that provision to all microbusinesses. We are also working closely with Invest NI to ensure that an integrated framework for management and leadership is in place. Those two developments will build on the Department's significant provision in that area and help to improve the advice, support and provision offered to a wider range of companies. My Department will also work with employers, particularly those in STEM areas, to encourage more of them to offer placements and scholarships to people studying relevant subjects at college and university. That is an important way in which employers can demonstrate the exciting opportunities that exist in Northern Ireland.

In response to the immediate imperative to rebuild the economy, I want to highlight a number of specific projects. A dynamic new approach in the employment service involves the creation of a new employer engagement team. Such a fresh and innovative approach will provide the advice and guidance that companies need during the current economic downturn. The preselection of suitable clients and pre-employment training to meet their recruitment needs will be key to the service. On-site redundancy services, with partner organisations, will also be on offer to those employers in a redundancy situation.

I am also aware of the concerns raised by employers about the employability skills of young people entering the workforce. Although a lot of excellent work has already taken place in our colleges and universities, I will examine whether more needs to be done to ensure that our young people develop key skills such as teamworking and problem-solving, as well as the work-based skills needed to gain employment in a highly competitive labour market.

I am also committed to ensuring that, in Northern Ireland, we stay ahead of the game. I have, therefore, introduced a skills-benchmarking project, which will seek to examine and benchmark our performance against other regions as well as assess the Department's performance and its associated impact on productivity and employment against other small, open and developed economies. By undertaking that analysis, we can judge our performance against previous years' efforts and also ensure that we remain competitive internationally.

I make it clear that the launch of the employer engagement plan is not the extent of my ambitions. Since taking office, I have been committed to addressing skills shortages and mismatches. I have recently announced further funding of over £6 million for colleges, through the continuation of the employer support programme for the next 4 years, commencing in this financial year, 2011-12. That programme enables colleges to develop a range of innovative projects to support local employers.

Yesterday, I attended the Software Testers Academy graduation, where 19 academy graduates received their software-testing certificates. Following the identification of a specific deficit of software testers, a pilot 14-week intensive training and placement programme was put in place, specifically targeted at non-information-technology graduates. The academy programme was developed jointly by the Department for Learning and Employment (DEL) and Invest NI, working alongside local industry and the South Eastern Regional College. Virtually all of the 19 trainees who completed the course have secured ongoing employment with their placement company.

I have also identified a number of sectors as priorities for my Department, and I shall outline some of the work that is being taken forward in those areas. The ICT industry continues to be an important driver in the economy, yet specific skills shortages and skills mismatches in software development, infrastructure management and applications management threaten to hamper potential growth in the sector. Building on previous work in that area, I have recently formed a new ICT working group, which brings together representatives from Invest Northern Ireland, DETI, the Department of Education, universities and further education colleges, the chair of the e-skills employer board, and the relevant business organisations. The purpose of that group is to agree a co-ordinated approach to assessing the ICT sector's current skills needs, to understand issues relating to the relevance of education and training provision, and to take forward an agreed action plan.

Alongside that work, my officials, together with those from Invest NI and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, have been working with representatives from the food and drink manufacturing sector to address their specific skill needs. Work is under way to finalise a short-term action plan to increase management and leadership skills and to attract more talent into the industry. That will be finalised in the coming months. With the industry's vision driving this process, positive change will soon be realised.

Over the next two years, Northern Ireland will host an impressive series of events and celebrations and the launch of many exciting new visitor attractions. Those events offer us an opportunity to showcase what our region has to offer. I recognise the opportunities for the tourism and hospitality industry over this period, and I am determined to make the most of them to provide employment for the local labour market and to boost the local economy. Obviously, the skills of staff in the hospitality sector are fundamental to that success, and I have decided that support for skills development in the sector should be a priority. My Department's skills solutions team has been working with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and People 1st, the sector skills council for hospitality. It has developed and put in place a customised training programme for customer service known as WorldHost.

Other sectors of importance include retail, financial services, advanced manufacturing, advanced engineering and emerging sectors such as health and life sciences. My Department is currently reviewing the future provision and funding arrangements for adult training in the workplace, including apprenticeships, to ensure that resources are targeted more effectively on the priority skill needs of the economy and meet the needs of adult learners. A steering group has been established to take the views of the key stakeholders on the findings of the research and to help formulate the new policy and funding arrangements.

As well as that sectoral approach, my Department continues to work closely with Invest Northern Ireland to maximise our offering to potential inward investors. Under the assured skills programme, my officials work to draw together the talent and expertise contained in our further and higher education sectors, as well as our own experience of assisting companies to find and train new staff.

11.15 am

We are able to put together a custom-built training package that, as well as growing indigenous businesses, assures newcomers to Northern Ireland that the skills that they need to make their investment a success can be found here. That relatively new programme is already playing a strong role in growing our economy and providing employment opportunities for our workers, and I plan to build on that successful work.

The Department cannot achieve the results that we aspire to on its own. It is clear to me that, if we are to make meaningful inroads into improving the skills of our workforce, we need more of our employers to buy into the skills agenda. Northern Ireland needs companies that are serious about training and upskilling their workforce and committed to improving skills for the benefit of their businesses and for Northern Ireland plc. I believe that the projects detailed in the employer engagement plan will help to make real progress towards ensuring that we have the skilled people that we need to avail ourselves of the current and future opportunities and to support the economic vision set out in the economic strategy and the Programme for Government.

Mr Buchanan (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning): I welcome the Minister's statement, which sets out in some detail the work that the Department is doing on the issue of skills development and skills shortage in Northern Ireland. Can the Minister give the House some indication of what level of engagement there has been with businesses and employers prior to the establishing of the employer engagement plan, which sets out the 20 projects and initiatives? Can he further elaborate on the role and function of the foresight unit that is being established between DEL and DETI?

Dr Farry: I thank the Deputy Chair of the Committee for his comments and his recognition of the work that the Department is doing, particularly on the skills agenda, for the future development of the economy in Northern Ireland.

He stressed, quite rightly, the importance of developing this with business. Doing it in a vacuum is completely pointless, so ongoing development of our policies and strategies with the business community is absolutely critical. That has been very clear at all levels, whether we are talking about the skills strategy, the employer engagement plan or some

of the specific projects that flow from that plan. We have set up a specific steering group to advise us on the review of adult training, and that draws on representatives from the business community to ensure that what we are doing meets the needs of business.

We have to make sure that what we do in Northern Ireland is incredibly efficient and makes the best use of our scarce resources. Unless we are directly responsive to the needs and views of business, we will not be discharging our duty to spend public money efficiently. So, hopefully, I can give the Member and, indeed, the entire House the reassurance that we are working very closely with business.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Comments were made in last Wednesday's 'The Irish News' by the founder of Powerscreen in County Tyrone, Mr O'Neill, who identified the approach taken by many grammar schools as being too academic in the sense that it results in a situation where there is a shortage of skilled workers becoming available for the local engineering industry. Do the Minister and his Department agree with concerns that, for example, grammar schools do not engage adequately with further education colleges? Has there been, or will there be, extensive engagement with the local engineering sector?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question; he raises some very important issues.

Let me first address the general point that he makes. We have to make sure that what happens with education is highly relevant to the future needs of the economy, and that involves what happens in the school system, in the further education system and in universities. I am very pleased that the Department of Education has come on board the ICT working group, and, to take one example, we are looking at the need to develop more bespoke courses on software programming and software development as opposed to what is currently the case in ICT, which is more about the use of applications. Employers often do not need that as much as they need the actual software skills.

He mentions issues with engineering. I am very aware of the comments that have been made, and I have heard others expressing them. I recently held discussions on those matters with the CBI, and my officials have followed those up. We are doing a scoping exercise with business to put together a report on what is happening in the engineering sector and whether there are particular skills shortages and mismatches. On the back of that assessment, I am prepared to consider the establishment of a further engineering skills working group to try to bring the education providers and business around a table to thrash out the issues and, potentially, draw together an action plan for that sector. I am very alert to the issues that Mr McElduff has raised, and we will see whether we need to intervene in the manner that I have suggested in a few weeks.

Mr P Ramsey: This is a good announcement by the Minister about the employer engagement plan. Although we can be critical of the Department on many occasions, this is certainly good news. The Minister is clearly aware of the Committee's focus, certainly over the past year or more, on young people not in education or training. Can the Minister assure the House that young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) will not be further marginalised or excluded from upskilling?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Ramsey for his question. Let me reassure the Member in a couple of respects. First, in response to Mr Buchanan, I stressed the importance of ensuring that we use the resources within our economy very efficiently. It is my philosophy that every person in this society has the potential to make a contribution to our economy. If we do not invest the resources to allow every person to develop to their full potential, that individual will suffer and our economy will also suffer because we have an untapped resource. We cannot afford resources to be used inefficiently.

To specifically address the comment made by the Member, I am certainly committed to driving up skills across a very broad front. We cannot afford any particular sector to be neglected. The Member will be aware that my Department leads on behalf of the Executive in relation to NEETs and that we are currently finalising an interdepartmental strategy called Pathways to Success, which I intend to bring to the Executive in April. I will make a full statement to the House thereafter. It goes hand in hand with everything we do.

Mr Dickson: I add my congratulations to the Minister on his statement. Minister, what investment do you consider needs to be made in skills if the Executive were to secure changes to corporation tax in Northern Ireland?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. He raises a critical issue. It is important that we recognise that the skills needs of our economy may shift, maybe in some dramatic ways, maybe in some small, subtle ways, in the context of securing a lower level of corporation tax. At present, a lot of the support that we give to the demand side to help business is around the notion of subsidising costs, so we end up attracting investments with the non-profit centres of businesses coming into Northern Ireland. In the event that we had a lower level of corporation tax, we would have a shift in our focus towards incentivising profit making. The particular nature of the business that may grow in Northern Ireland or investment that would come in from overseas may change on the back of that.

It is very important that we are prepared well in advance of that so that we can meet the potential shifts in skills demand that would flow from a lower level of corporation tax. For that reason, I have commissioned a major piece of research to assess those particular points. I am pleased that Oxford Economics is undertaking that, and that report is due to be presented to me before the end of this month. I will be happy to make that research more widely available both to the Committee and wider society.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for his statement. I just want to touch on an issue that is relevant in my constituency, where local engineering firms are finding it very difficult to get the appropriate staff with the appropriate skills.

I welcome your engagement plan, but I want assurances that you will spread that out across Northern Ireland and make sure that people can stay in their home town if they wish.

Dr Farry: I thank Mrs Overend for her question. There were probably two elements to it. As for the latter point that she made, it is very much an employer engagement plan for Northern Ireland. I stressed that the skills solution service is available for employers anywhere. It is not a Belfast-based service, where the employer has to be sucked into that Belfast mindset to take it forward. It is available anywhere

in Northern Ireland for businesses to access and to have a bespoke response to the particular needs that they develop.

I am also very interested in the comments that the Member made about engineering. They reflected the comments that were made by Mr McElduff a few moments ago. It is perhaps further confirmation of what I am hearing; that there is potentially an issue in the engineering sector of which we need to be mindful. I give the Member the same assurance that I gave to Mr McElduff. We are currently investigating that in a systematic way. If there seems to be a strong case for an intervention to be made to try to bring together education providers and businesses to address some of the issues, I am certainly very committed to moving ahead in a very short timescale to do that.

Mr Ross: The Minister, quite rightly, talked about the importance of the tourism and hospitality sector, particularly in this year, which is our year of opportunity, with the Titanic signature building opening later this month, the hosting of the Irish Open and the new visitors' centre at the Giant's Causeway being among a range of things that we have. Does the Minister, therefore, agree that it is important that the impression with which visitors leave Northern Ireland is vital to our future tourism product? To that end, will he give us some detail of the type of work that is being done with taxi drivers, bus drivers, tour guides and those who work in hotels to ensure that the service that they offer visitors is up to scratch and that the impression that visitors leave Northern Ireland with is very positive and makes them want to come back?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. He identified a critical issue. It highlights the importance of Ministers and Departments working in partnership around these things. I recognise the work that has been taken forward by the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Executive to promote tourism and attract major events to Northern Ireland. My particular responsibility, as Minister for Employment and Learning, lies in investment in the skills of our workforce, which is why I have prioritised tourism and hospitality as a priority skills sector in response to the needs of the sector and the huge opportunities that exist for Northern Ireland.

The Member was also quite right to identify the importance of people's experience of hospitality and whether they would return to Northern Ireland and recommend to other family members or friends that they should visit Northern Ireland. The evidence from other situations overseas strongly indicates that the level of the hospitality and experience is critical to return visitors, which is why it is so important that we invest. We have put together a bespoke programme called WorldHost, which was developed with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and People 1st, which is the sector skills council. Some very early courses that are based around catering activities have been established through the Northern Regional College, and we are very mindful of moving ahead quickly, given that the Irish Open will be on the north coast this summer.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. On the back of what has been said, Vancouver in Canada and parts of Australia specialise in hospitality and the tourist industry, and they make people feel special when they arrive. My question is about the consequences of the economic downturn.

Thousands of people have lost their jobs in such sectors as the construction industry. Will the Minister explain what is being done to adapt victims of unemployment to new and meaningful opportunities?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr McCann for his question. He was very apt in drawing attention to Vancouver as the example. The person who organised the Olympic Games in Vancouver for the British Columbia tourist board was the key presenter at the launch of the WorldHost initiative in Northern Ireland. I wondered whether Mr McCann had been there and picked it up. So, yes, we are learning from best international practice.

11.30 am

It is important that we recognise that there is a retraining challenge in the construction sector. In some respects, the Executive will do what they can to increase the demand for construction skills, whether through moving ahead with important capital projects or with the green new deal, which is dear to my heart. It is equally important that we recognise that a number of people in construction will need to be retrained for other activities. Demand in the future may not be at the level of four or five years ago. All that we do is geared towards offering people who have been through formal education the opportunities to retrain. That is why I stress that 80% of the 2020 workforce are already in work or have left school. The plan is being launched today to focus on their needs, as opposed to the needs of those in the formal education system.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for his statement announcing the strategy and plan. I was at Harland and Wolff shipyard recently with my colleague Peter Robinson. During our meetings, senior management said that they had a number of skills shortages. They stressed that flexibility from DEL officials was required with older workers who are very skilled but have maybe 80% of the skills needed to be a piping engineer or an electrician. They supported the work done to date but they encouraged us to ensure that the plan will have a flexibility of working —

Mr Speaker: I encourage the Member just to —

Mr Douglas: Sorry, I will ask my question. In working with Harland and Wolff and the training providers, will there be that flexibility?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Douglas for his question. I understand the thrust of what he said. It is important to recognise that, on the one hand, we have the formal qualification system that we all know and recognise, and, on the other hand, people doing the job in the workplace may not have those qualifications but, over time, have built up experience and knowledge. That is why one of the key strands in the employer plan is the recognition of, and trying to find a means of accreditation for, that in-house knowledge and in-company training. That is a particular way in which we can address the needs of the type of worker whom Mr Douglas described and of whom there are many others.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat. Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil leis an Aire as a ráiteas agus as a chuid freagraí. I thank the Minister for his statement. He outlined an ambitious strategy. What processes and procedures does he have in place to track and monitor progress?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr McCartney for his question. As I stated, we have 20 different projects. We also have a wonderful flow chart, which will be part of the publication on the website showing the timescales for each of the programmes. That will be made public and be transparent so that I, my officials, MLAs, the public and businesses will be clear about what will be done, when it will be done and by whom it will be done. They will be able to monitor progress.

Mr Byrne: I also welcome the Minister's comprehensive statement, which reflects the general anxiety in industry. Will the Department give due consideration to having more employer-based, quality training schemes, such as those in Bombardier Shorts, which has an excellent school of training for modern apprenticeships and higher technician training? I think that that is crucial, particularly for the engineering industry in Tyrone and mid-Ulster, which was referred to last week by Mr Pat O'Neill.

Mr Speaker: I encourage the Member to finish.

Mr Byrne: I am trying to be relevant, Mr Speaker.

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Byrne for his question, which reflects some of the issues that Mr Douglas raised about the importance of recognising in-company training and its efficiency.

Often, in the education system, we are essentially making a best guess as to what employers need. That is done with the best of intentions but sometimes with imperfect knowledge. Work training is done within companies and is very directly associated with the particular needs of a particular business.

One of the more exciting aspects of the employer engagement plan lies in the potential to move towards a level 4 apprenticeship, which we hope to commence piloting later in 2012. Members will be aware that, at present, apprenticeships apply only to levels 2 and 3. Level 4 apprenticeship exists elsewhere in the world, and it is important that we make clear that apprenticeships are a very viable and fruitful way of accessing employment, even employment at high levels. We are starting in the ICT and engineering sectors. I hope that that sends out an important signal that there is a range of choices available for young people with regard to their future.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Minister for his statement. The Minister will be aware that 41.6% of the working-age population have no qualifications whatsoever. What flexibility and innovation will his Department bring to encourage the upskilling of this workforce? If I were an employer and I had a large, low-skilled workforce, I would not want my employees going, during my time, to take those extra qualifications and courses. I suggest that there should be work at weekends and in evening classes that will fit in with the schedules of that workforce, which vitally needs to upskill.

Dr Farry: I thank Mr McIlveen for his question, which stretches beyond the immediate scope of the employer engagement plan but highlights the need for an integrated approach to skills. Shortly, I will release a more overarching plan that tries to knit together what we are doing — in higher education, the employment service, further education and this plan to deal with business — to show how it is all integrated.

On the specific points that he raises, we cannot afford for people to be underskilled. We need to invest across a broader front. We have a legacy issue in Northern Ireland,

with too many people with low or no qualifications. As to the remedy for that, we offer a whole package of different skills, including essential skills, literacy, numeracy and basic ICT skills. On that point, I say to employers that they should engage with the Skills Solution Service that my Department offers, and the advice on courses. There is flexibility as to when and how such courses are undertaken.

I say to employers that it is of fundamental importance that they invest in the skills of their staff, not out of altruism for Northern Ireland but for the sake of the bottom line of their business. Investing in your staff is a good thing for your business, and the evidence shows that businesses that invest in staff are often better geared to survive through difficult times and will grow more rapidly when there is a recovery in the Northern Ireland economy.

Mr Allister: I wish this initiative well. However, I am sure that the Minister agrees that, ultimately, it will be judged not by its promise but its delivery. In that regard, I press the Minister further on the issue of tracking and monitoring its success or otherwise. It surely requires more than the publication of flow charts to drill in and see whether the project is working. Therefore, will there be hands-on monitoring directing this programme and delivering results to make sure that it is achieving?

Mr Speaker: I encourage the Member to finish.

Mr Allister: More than once, the Employment and Learning Committee has been surprised by the lack of tracking —

Mr Speaker: I must insist that the Member comes to his question.

Mr Allister: Will there be monitoring and hands-on tracking of this programme?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Allister for his question. The comment that he made at the start of it is absolutely true; this will be judged on results and how we improve the skills of people in the workplace. It is also, in a more general sense, about how we match demand and supply in Northern Ireland.

We need the two to be tracked together as efficiently as possible. That is why it is important that I, as Minister, and my Department try to address skills shortages and mismatches where they occur. Those can change and flip over time, and a skills shortage can become a skills glut very quickly, which is why we need constant monitoring and to challenge ourselves in that respect.

I can also give the Member an assurance that the plan will be more than simply a glossy document as far as monitoring is concerned. It is core to my Department and will be deeply embedded in its internal business plans. Indeed, whether it involves the skills directorate, senior management or the permanent secretary, there will be close tracking of our performance and delivery on all the projects set out in the plan today.

Mr B McCrea (The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning): I apologise for my delay in getting to the Chamber. There was something of a roadblock on the way down. Nevertheless, here I am.

Minister, I listened intently as you outlined your plan for employer engagement. Can you tell me what role Bill McGinnis, the Department's skills adviser, has had in the development

of the strategy and why you think it is necessary to do something different, given that the Department has a skills council advising it?

Dr Farry: I thank the Chair for his question and his ongoing interest in these activities. Bill McGinnis is the skills adviser, and I was pleased to reappoint him this year. He was central to the identification of priority skills sectors, and we continue to build on those. He has an ongoing role in liaising with employers and is very forthcoming in providing feedback. Ultimately, however, Bill McGinnis is not a delivery arm; he is an adviser and he will feed the business community's views into the Department's work.

Today, we are setting out the action plan and how we will build on what we are hearing from business on the particular needs of employers. We are setting out the projects that will be taken forward over the next 18 months to address the particular concerns raised and to ensure that we in Northern Ireland seize the opportunities to grow our economy over the months and years to come.

Executive Committee Business

Labour Relations Agency Code of Practice on Time Off for Trade Union Duties and Activities

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): I beg to move

That the draft Labour Relations Agency Code of Practice on Time Off for Trade Union Duties and Activities be approved.

This draft code of practice is subject to approval by resolution of the Assembly as laid down in the governing primary legislation, the Industrial Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1992.

It may be helpful if I outline for Members the background to this draft code. The Labour Relations Agency (LRA) has a legal duty to provide practical guidance that clarifies when an employer should facilitate trade union representatives and members in taking time off. LRA fulfils this obligation through the publication, 'Code of Practice: Time Off for Trade Union Duties and Activities'.

There is a substantial body of legislation that provides the right to time off for trade union duties and activities in specified circumstances. Such rights also stipulate whether there is a right to pay while conducting such duties and activities. The revised code will assist employers and trade union representatives to better understand the legislation and will help them to deal with the day-to-day issues that can arise when requests for time off are made. It also provides good practice guidance on maintaining positive relationships more generally; for example, through the development of formal agreements and the provision of facilities.

The code, in common with its predecessor, does not confer any new rights. Rather, it offers greater clarity on existing rights and promotes good practice that will help employers and trade unions more effectively to discharge their respective responsibilities. Failure to observe the code will not itself render a party liable to tribunal proceedings. However, the provisions of the code can be admissible in evidence and taken into account by an industrial tribunal during any relevant proceedings.

In these difficult times, it is also important to highlight that the new code does not incur any additional costs for employers. There are costs associated with the existing statutory framework, which already provides for time off for trade union duties and activities. The draft code imposes no new requirements that would serve to increase that financial burden.

11.45 am

To their credit, many employers often go beyond what the legislation requires in facilitating good industrial relations. However, the code takes a pragmatic approach in making it clear that any potential additional facilities need to be reasonable and proportionate to the particular workplace.

The current code of practice has been in place since 2004 and does not adequately reflect the significant changes that have occurred in the modern workplace. Nor does that code take account of amendments to the governing legislation that were made over the past eight years.

The Labour Relations Agency conducted a 12-week public consultation on the draft code of practice. The consultation sought views on the provision of cover and adjustment of workloads for representatives; advice on training and e-learning for workplace representatives; facilitating representatives who have atypical work patterns or who support employees with atypical work patterns; access to ICT equipment and the internet by representatives; the confidentiality of communications involving representatives while ensuring necessary workplace security; and the growth in non-union representation. The responses from key stakeholders demonstrated that the proposed revisions were broadly welcomed.

The draft code provides clear definitions of the various types of trade union representative and interpretation of the extent of rights afforded to them by legislation; more clarity on the calculation of pay for time off for trade union duties, particularly where various shift bonus and performance-related payments apply; guidance on the provision of cover and the adjustment of workloads for representatives; guidance relating to the impact on the modern workplace — for example, the use of ICT equipment, access to e-learning materials and arrangements involving employees and representatives on atypical work patterns; expanded guidance to parties on their mutual obligations, particularly with regard to requesting and facilitating time off while minimising the impact on business operations; advice on the confidentiality of communications between an employer and representatives and between representatives and the membership of the union; and more detailed advice on the benefits and scope of formal agreements on time off for trade union duties and activities.

LRA has also updated references in the code to take account of changes to the statutory provisions governing time off for trade union duties and activities. I am grateful to LRA for its work in revising the code and consider that it will make a significant contribution to the development of better working relationships between management and trade unions. We are in challenging times, and it is vital that we retain a focus on supporting productive workplaces through the creation of a positive employment relations culture.

I am also grateful to the Committee for Employment and Learning for its scrutiny of the draft code. I hope that I have provided the House with sufficient explanation of the purpose of the revised code of practice. I will, of course, respond in my closing remarks to any points made by Members.

Mr B McCrea (The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning): We agreed at the Committee that I would not speak on behalf of the Committee but as an individual. Nevertheless, I do not think there is anything of contention in the points that the Minister put forward. I agree with him that, in these trying times, it is appropriate that we have the best possible labour relations, and we ought to take every step to support that.

Mr Lyttle: I am happy to support the proposals that are being put forward.

Dr Farry: I am very grateful to all those Members who contributed to the debate — that is what it says in my notes anyway. In all sincerity, however, this is largely a technical matter. I appreciate the comments from Basil

McCrea, in a personal capacity, I suppose, rather than as Chair of the Committee. However, what he said reflects that we need a common-sense approach to this issue, and it is in everyone's interests that we promote a harmonious workplace, whether we are talking about businesses themselves and their performance or individual employees and their welfare. I hope that the guidance will enable us to move forward on that basis and provide everyone involved with greater clarity on the current situation in Northern Ireland.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the draft Labour Relations Agency Code of Practice on Time Off for Trade Union Duties and Activities be approved.

Private Members' Business

Educational Assistance for Young People

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

Mr Easton: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the good work being done by further education colleges, as well as by schools; and calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to establish a working group, comprising officials from the Department for Social Development, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the South Eastern Regional College and the PSNI to identify ways of improving access to further education for young people experiencing health, social and housing problems by addressing any barriers that exist in these areas.

At the outset, I wish to say that we accept the Alliance Party amendment. It has been the policy of successive governments to increase the number of young people with access to training and education post-16 years of age. It is recognised that not only does the young person benefit from undertaking such training but communities benefit from an enhanced skills base that can aid economic recovery and growth.

It is my contention that although much work has been done by various agencies and educational institutions, the time has now come for a more joined-up approach to tackling the barriers that still exist to our young people achieving their full potential and contributing effectively to the economy. Many reports cite statistic after statistic on the nature of the barriers that young people face when attempting to fulfil their academic and vocational potential.

The reasons for disengagement and low achievement are varied. They range from poverty and deprivation, to being in our care system, to getting involved in crime. Therefore, it is important that all agencies that have an interest in addressing those issues, or a statutory duty to help to reduce them, are involved in creating any possible solutions.

It is important to remember that in the vast majority of cases, young people do not face one barrier in isolation. Very often, a number of barriers are present. It is also the case that, at times, one barrier can lead to another. Often, young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) after compulsory education has ended will not be the first in their family to have disengaged. Often, the legacy of failure to fulfil potential is not down to lack of ambition but to numerous factors, which then become a self-fulfilling prophecy for a young person.

It is often said that the early years are the most important in an individual's life. Often, lessons and beliefs gained in those formative years remain with us throughout life, and, for some, factors can impact on our health and other

outcomes. Poverty in those early years can have a dramatic impact on a person's educational outcome post-16.

In the first years of primary school, the basic rules of literacy and numeracy are taught. If children fall behind at that level and the issue is not addressed, there is a good chance that they will never catch up, and that can have an impact on their educational outcome.

The 2006 'Effective Pre-school Provision in Northern Ireland' report found that in the first four years of primary school, children living in deprived areas attained lower scores in numeracy and literacy and made less progress than those from more affluent areas. Although attempts are made to address that barrier through reading recovery and maths recovery programmes, limited funding means that schools have to assess who is most in need, and some children may miss out.

The home learning environment was also highlighted in the report. The partnership between the school and children's parents/guardians is vital. How children are brought up to regard education and training will help to develop their goals and ambitions. Parents who have negative experiences of learning or are stressed about poverty and unemployment may be less likely to engage with their child or the school.

It has been found that many children raised in households in which there are long periods of unemployment internalise that environment and are more likely than children of working households to end up on benefits.

The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust also discovered the link between children living in poverty and low academic achievement. In the current economic situation, in which more people have to live on reduced incomes, the issue needs to be addressed in a positive way. If we can engage positively with our young people, we may be able to break the cycle.

Young people with mental health issues are also a vulnerable group who are at risk of underachieving. Barnardo's recently conducted a study that found that of a group of young people who are currently or who have recently been identified as NEET, nearly one quarter indicated that their special educational needs, learning difficulties or disabilities had prevented them from achieving at school. The two most common conditions were dyslexia and attention deficit disorder. From speaking to constituents in my area, I am aware that many fear that proposed changes to the way in which statements of special educational needs will be developed will mean that children in the future will not be able to achieve their full potential. Learning difficulties mean that an individual can be at risk from exclusion, underachievement and poor outcomes, including offending. The barrier that learning difficulties and disabilities proves to be to an individual throughout their learning lifetime has long been known, and it is important that, as elected representatives, we develop, in accordance with all stakeholders in the area, a strategy that can help individuals to become the best that they can be.

It is important that the Assembly, with all statutory and voluntary and community sector agencies, helps to mitigate the impact of adverse home life situations. An unsustainable home life can affect the resilience and emotional health of young people, which has an impact on their educational outcomes.

Research shows that a child's emotional health at the age of 10 is a key factor in determining mental health at the age of 16 and life chances at the age of 20. Action for Children's research shows a distinct lack of activity for children between the ages of six and 13 to develop good emotional health. Having poor emotional health, which often manifests itself through low self-esteem, makes the years between the ages of six and 13 the most important element. That is the age range when bullying and peer pressure come into play, and children can also have their first exposure to substances that are open to abuse. Combining those issues with family factors, poverty and deprivation may mean that children from such backgrounds who are already marginalised may experience a greater barrier to those positive educational and training outcomes. Research shows that some children regress in academic standards during the first two years of secondary school, with a well-documented dip in attainment, and emotional well-being scores also significantly dipping. We must all work together to help to promote good emotional health and to teach our young people that emotional health is as important as physical health.

Those are just some of the barriers to further education that young people in Northern Ireland society face in continuing their education. Some Departments have put in place a number of schemes to address those barriers. The essential skills provision and the subsequent media campaign aim to raise levels of numeracy, ICT and literacy, not only for young people who have disengaged from the learning environment but for adults. That is important. If we can encourage parents to return to get essential skills, that sends a positive message to their children and to young people that training and education have a value for them.

The South Eastern Regional College has developed a programme designed specifically to encourage disengaged adults and young people back to a learning and training environment. Adults entering those courses can help to break the cycle of poor achievement and the failure, for some people in this economy, to maximise their potential.

It is imperative that all agencies that have an interest in increasing achievement work together to develop co-ordinated programmes that will help to address the issues and barriers to achievement that many people in Northern Ireland live with. The programmes, coupled with financial packages such as the education maintenance allowance (EMA), mean that those from the most economically disadvantaged backgrounds may be encouraged to remain in education or training. However, for a large number of people who are in receipt of certain benefits or who live in hostels with inflexible hours, no amount of attractive educational programmes, training packages or small EMAs will be able to entice them into education and training. For that group of young people and adults, it is important to find a solution that will remove those barriers and give them the financial ability to live and study or ensure that they are not in danger of being on the streets should they try to increase their knowledge or skills. Lessons learned from people who survive on benefits show a reluctance to enter into short-term schemes with no discernible outcomes.

For example, programmes that place people in employment for short periods of time for a slight increase in their benefits, but with no prospects of a proper job at the end, serve only to alienate those already disengaged by seemingly

reinforcing the belief that it does not matter what training or job expertise a person has, there are no full-time jobs.

The financial cost of any working group and the cost of any programmes identified will be offset by the saving and income that will come from Northern Ireland raising the level of skills on offer to potential investors. We cannot stand idly by and watch the gap between those with positive educational outcomes and those who disengage continue to grow. Action is needed to ensure that every young person in Northern Ireland has the ability and opportunity to become the best that they can.

12.00 noon

Mr Lyttle: I beg to move the following amendment: Leave out all after "working group," and insert

"as part of a wider delivery mechanism to support the forthcoming Executive strategy for young people not in employment, education or training, comprising officials from the Department for Social Development, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, all further education colleges and the PSNI, to identify ways of improving access to further education for young people experiencing a range of personal and social barriers."

I welcome the support for the amendment. The need for the Assembly to respond to the issue in a co-ordinated and effective way cannot be overstated. The most recent Labour Force Survey showed that 48,000 of our young people could be classified as being not in education, employment or training. That figure is one that we have heard in the House before and one that, I am sure, everyone would agree is deeply worrying, considering the ongoing economic forecasts.

As the Employment and Learning Committee inquiry into NEETs recommended in 2010, any strategy for Northern Ireland should be based on structures that cement partnership, co-operation and co-ordination between all Executive Departments, other agencies and bodies and stakeholder groups, including the business community, schools, universities and colleges. The report made it clear that a multiagency and cross-departmental approach has to become the accepted way to work if we are to tackle this issue but also that individual bodies should provide oversight of the development and implementation of the strategy. The Committee report suggested that OFMDFM would be the Department best placed to perform that role. To that end, the Employment and Learning Committee inquiry advocated that the core of any NEETs strategy must involve Executive Departments looking beyond their own remit towards greater collaboration, along with community and voluntary groups, which can also be guilty, at times, of focusing on their own important challenges and not regarding themselves as part of a wider framework in which they engage and share work with others. A joined-up approach is, therefore, essential in this area.

I believe that the Alliance Party's amendment to the motion is to be supported. It makes it clear that the establishment of any working group containing all the stakeholders mentioned should look to improve access to further education for young people with social barriers but that must be integrated into a wider delivery mechanism, supporting a full Executive approach to the delivery of the NEETs strategy.

The work that colleges do in this regard should be recognised. Schemes such as Training for Success, Essential Skills and Skills for Work have helped give young people the skills needed to break into the workplace. In addition, we should recognise the advice and encouragement colleges provide in recruiting young people to their institutions and the hard-working staff in those organisations.

Mr F McCann: We have sat down as a party and discussed the amendment, but it is difficult to support it. Everything that it says is right, with the exception that you are asking us to support an amendment before people have had sight of the Executive strategy for young people —

Mr Speaker: Can the Member turn to the mic so that the whole House can hear?

Mr F McCann: Sorry. I am just raising the point that it is difficult to support the amendment when people have not had sight of the Executive strategy for young people, which is the total emphasis of the amendment.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for that intervention. The strategy referred to is the NEETs strategy, on which consultative work has been completed.

Mr F McCann: It does not say that.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Lyttle: Well, that is the strategy being referred to.

We should recognise the good work being done in colleges. Recently, I attended the South Eastern Regional College and saw first-hand on that visit the exceptional work being done in this area. The NRC and the BMC have been awarded the Frank Buttle Trust charter mark for innovative, proactive work in helping young people from a care background gain access to further and higher education. The colleges' good work is to be recognised, and it was highlighted in a recent evidence session to the Committee, which confirmed that our colleges deliver education and training to one in three of all 16- to 17-year-old school leavers involved in partnerships at local learning community level.

Colleges have a very important part to play. I agree with the call in the motion to improve access to further education for young people facing multiple barriers, and I encourage the House to support the motion, as amended, and, indeed, the positive collaboration that is needed to improve education, training and employment outcomes for young people in Northern Ireland.

Mr B McCrea (The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning): With the Speaker's permission, I will speak for a few minutes as Chair, and then I will offer some points on an individual basis.

First, the Committee is greatly exercised by the plight of people who are NEET. In fact, the amendment and the motion mention that there has been a report. We have looked to see what we can do. Sadly, we do not seem to have been able to make much of an impression on that. The Committee brought a motion to the Assembly to urge people to make sure that this is not missed off the agenda. No doubt the Minister will take an opportunity to reflect on that.

Secondly, there is the overall issue of the skills agenda. We need to make sure that, whatever structures come out in

the future, we have some interaction on how we develop a skills agenda that people will buy into. The most compelling problem, I think, is that the people whom we are most keen to get hold of are those who are least interested in schooling or in getting skills, potentially because of challenges in the parental home or some other societal issues. That is why it is interesting from a Committee point of view that we look at having a joined-up approach on the matter. The Committee welcomes the House's debate on this important issue, but we are not sure what the future structures will be to take it forward.

I will make a few observations now as an MLA and a member of the Committee nevertheless. It is interesting that the motion highlights the South Eastern Regional College. I am not sure why one college in particular is identified, although, of course, it has a significant campus in Lisburn. All the colleges that I am aware of do really good work in this area. It seems to me that the motion has, perhaps, drifted a wee bit from its original intention. The colleges are particularly adept at looking after students who are in their care. They bring forward pastoral care. The real challenge here is to make sure that people who go to college do not drop out. There are multiple challenges for young people; everything from teenage pregnancies to trouble at home to somebody melting their head. There are real issues.

I had occasion to go to the Southern Regional College to have explained to me the system that it has. I have to tell you, Mr Speaker, that I was completely surprised and in awe of the amount of work that the dedicated staff do. They check attendances and make sure that people turn up. If they do not turn up, they want to know why. I think some of them might even go beyond their remit a wee bit and phone people at home and ask them why they are not going to be in college. That attitude makes the difference for all the colleges, and it should be built on. However, there is an issue before that, and I think the Member who moved the motion mentioned it. When you look at NEETs, you can see that the key issue is that the most fundamental stage for disengagement is when the young person is aged between 14 and 16. You can see that the majority of people stop going to school at that stage. In fact, my colleague Mr Roy Beggs identified that there are about four or five wards in Northern Ireland with absence rates in excess of 40%. The simple fact is this: if you do not go to school, there is nothing the school can do about it. We need to find ways of identifying those people and how we might engage with them.

Mrs D Kelly: Does the Member agree that a lot more needs to be done in the early years with regard to prevention so that the colleges are not spending their money and resources on providing basic literacy and numeracy skills to our young people? Does he agree that the education system fails far too many of our children?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr B McCrea: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I know that, when Mrs Kelly was Chair of the Committee, she would have looked at this, and I have no doubt that she will make a contribution to the debate. We do not have time to cover the whole issue in five minutes. However, I can roll it back to say that we need to get engagement at as early an age as possible. Teachers at nursery schools can identify children — even those at the age of four — who are likely to struggle throughout the rest of their life. The key point that

we should look at is that there are very many areas where young people touch our organisations, be they the PSNI, nurseries, schools or some other organisation, and yet we do not seem to pick them up in some form of safety net. That is the key issue that we want to address.

I will not detain the House because I know that other Members want to speak. However, there is a key issue: if we are going to remove DEL, that does not remove the need to concentrate on the issues that the Department is focusing on, particularly skills, our young people and those who are not in education, employment or training. Those areas need some type of formal assessment and some way of bringing things together. I am not sure what that structure should be, but I am absolutely clear that we need some sort of structure or those people will be consigned to the waste bin.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The motion says most of the right words about how we improve access to further education for young people who, because of social factors, find barriers in their way. Although I have no problem with the formation of a working group to deal with the issue, I have a problem with the restrictive nature of the motion. For one, it excludes the Department of Education. Most of what has been said in the debate has referred to the underachievement of young people, the educational attainment of 14- to 16-year-olds, and people opting out of education. That all has to do with the Department of Education, and the motion does not state what role it should play.

If the proposer of the motion had explained the logic behind it, I might have understood the rationale behind why the south-eastern region was the only area mentioned in it. I say that not because I believe that that area does not need attention focused on it but because I represent an area that has a serious housing shortage, major health problems and crime statistics that are mind-blowing. It also has serious problems with young people of 11 years and over who have opted out of the system, which, I may add, has let them down.

I recently presented certificates to young people in their mid-teens who had tapped into a vibrant community network in the area. Those young people had been let down by the system, but the local community education project saw the potential in those young people and helped them through courses. At the end of those courses, they received the equivalent of GCSEs.

I also attended meetings with DSD and DEL. We came together to discuss their proposals to cut grants to a local group that has provided training for hundreds of people, young and old, over several years. The reason given to the group was not that it provided poor training — in fact, the opposite was the case — but that the Departments believed the training could be provided by one of the formal training agencies. In an attempt to deny the local community training organisation that minor funding, they denied people who had dropped out of the system the opportunity to get the training they required to at least put them on a level playing field when searching for work. I explained to DSD and DEL that most of the people who attended the course ranged from their late teens to their 40s. The difficulties being placed in the way by Departments are fairly typical. They are inflexible and adopt a teacher/pupil approach to the delivery of resources and services. The people who attended those

courses will probably just drop off the chart. Who will be the losers? I have to say that it will be all of us.

As a new member of the Employment and Learning Committee, I have listened to officials speak about those not in education, employment or training. The very groups that I have mentioned were set up to help those NEETs. The area where that took place is one of the most socially deprived in the North, and it comes top in almost all the barometers of poverty and social deprivation. I would have no difficulty supporting the formation of a working group if it were widened to take in other areas of the North and not selectively zero in on one area. I agree that education is the key for young people, but training also has a major part to play in preparing people for employment.

12.15 pm

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning):

I will be happy to cover the points in my own comments later on, but it may be helpful at this stage to stress that the Department of Education is central to the development of any strategy around NEETs. My Department may well lead on that, but we do so on behalf of a number of Departments, and the Department of Education is central. Placing the framework of the motion within the context of what the Executive will do about NEETs and wider activities around children and young people will hopefully address the concerns that the Member has and ensure that it is an inclusive process and all the right people are at the table.

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

Mr F McCann: I appreciate what the Member has said, but the fact is that the Department of Education has been left out of the amendment. Nobody has stood up and said why. Most of the debate this morning has taken place around young people between the ages of 14 and 16, who fit in to the brief of the Department of Education.

Mr Lyttle: I appreciate the request for clarification. The amendment aims to ensure that every relevant Department and the full remit of colleges are included. The amendment states:

“as part of a wider delivery mechanism to support the forthcoming Executive strategy for young people not in employment, education or training”.

That wider delivery mechanism, of course, includes the Department of Education as a key delivery partner — *[Interruption]*. Well, there are other Departments that are not listed.

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us not have a debate across the Chamber. Allow the Member to continue.

Mr Lyttle: I hope that that clarifies the issue: the wider delivery mechanism includes the Education Department.

Mr F McCann: It quite clearly does not include the Department of Education, and I am asking why. What I have got up to now is excuses.

If we are serious about bringing down the barriers that stop people accessing further education, we also need to look at how policies are delivered from within Departments. It is not good enough to say that there are health, social and housing

reasons that prohibit young people from taking up education or training. Did we ever think that the people who deliver the policies may also have got it wrong? Any working group needs to have a holistic approach that covers external and internal procedures, with recommendations to put it right. This is in no way a criticism of further education colleges. I know many young people who have attained the skills and education to move on to employment.

We cannot look at these issues without mentioning the impact that welfare reform legislation will have.

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

Mr F McCann: The Housing Rights Service has predicted a huge rise in repossessions, and many other young people will be affected by the introduction of the shared room allowance.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr F McCann: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I should have had an extra two minutes there.

Mr P Ramsey: The SDLP welcomes the motion and the amendment. The early part of the motion refers to further education colleges, and I think the contribution that the colleges in Northern Ireland make in the development of young people across all sectors is clear.

For the record, I understand Members raising the issue of young people not in education, employment or training. It has exercised the minds of members of the Employment and Learning Committee for a considerable time now, as the Chair said. We get frustrated and angry with departmental officials because of the slowness of the process for bringing forward the strategic objectives and plan that the Minister referred to. I am aware that he intends to brief the Committee over the next two weeks.

I think it is reasonable, on the point made by Fra McCann, not to name the Department of Education. The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is not named either. It has a clear role around children and young people. The spirit of the motion is that there is a need. We had robust exchanges last week with departmental officials about the dozens of cross-departmental collaborative groups that are in motion, but it has taken a long time for this Department to formalise an Executive approach in dealing with young people not in education, employment or training.

Mr B McCrea: Does the Member agree that it is important that the views expressed by the Committee are taken on board by the Executive and the Minister, about both NEETs and the development of a skills strategy?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr P Ramsey: I agree totally with the Member; his initial comments were right. The NEETs issue has exercised every member of the Employment and Learning Committee for the past two years, under the stewardship of the current Chairman and under my colleague Dolores Kelly before that. The Committee carried out an exhaustive inquiry into NEETs. We went on study visits to look at models of best practice, not just in Northern Ireland but in Wales and Scotland.

I get angry maybe not so much with the Minister but with the Department for not coming forward or being seen to

come forward with a mechanism enabling young people to have a greater role in society. I just do not see it, Minister, I really do not. We had a debate on the subject here two or three weeks ago in which Members from every party participated. However, the Minister made no reference to any of the contributions made by Members. He came in with a prepared script. We still await the Minister's strategy, although I understand that we will get it.

I feel that, at times, we collectively — I say this as a criticism of ourselves — let young people down, both as a group and individually. We saw the NEETs scoping study. There is a common factor running through that and many variables in every case. Other Members referred to that, and I can understand Fra getting uptight.

The proposer of the motion spoke well about primary school and post-primary school. Although it is necessary for the Minister for Employment and Learning to lead on the matter — he must take a much stronger lead than at present — other Departments such as DE, DHSSPS, DSD and OFMDFM need to come forward. The Committee heard from Include Youth and other groups about how marginalised young people are when they come out of care or prison. It is necessary, therefore, to involve other statutory agencies, which is why the PSNI was also referenced.

The issues have to be dealt with through a clearly defined, objective cross-departmental approach, but that has not happened. Why has it not happened, Minister? The Department has stated its intention to set it up, but when will it be set up? The Department has the lead on it. We get so frustrated. The Committee spent time exhaustively putting together an inquiry. This is the third time within a short period that NEETs has been discussed in the Chamber, but we do not see any action plan coming out the other end. The Minister may say later that he needs to discuss that with the Executive first, but he must come to the House and explain his intention to all of us.

Over 40,000 young people across Northern Ireland are not in education, employment or training. With welfare reform coming in, a further tsunami of young people who may be caught in a benefits culture will be forced to seek employment, education or training. What is being done? Tens of thousands of people are migrating from social security to employment and learning programmes. It is important that the Minister shares with us his intentions and says how he will facilitate young people and help them to become more active in a training or work environment.

Mr Douglas: I support the motion and the amendment. As our motion states, the issue also concerns the work of further education colleges. It is important to mention the excellent work of colleges such as Belfast Metropolitan College, which our Committee visited. I was a wee bit surprised that those colleges were not mentioned.

The motion also mentions ways of:

"improving access to further education for young people".

One of the Assembly's most encouraging initiatives and debates was on fuel poverty. We brought together the Chairs of all Committees and a range of people to look at fuel poverty cross-departmentally. The consensus was that that was a good example of people coming together and doing

something about fuel poverty. Hopefully, that will continue. Our Chair, Basil McCrea, mentioned the plight —

Mr McCartney: Will the Member give way?

Mr Douglas: Certainly.

Mr McCartney: Given the example of the fuel poverty initiative bringing all the Departments together, does the Member accept that the motion and the amendment are lacking, in that they do not mention the Department of Education?

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

Mr Douglas: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

That is an important issue and is certainly something that we need to look at. The fuel poverty initiative brought the key people together. I think that that is what you are saying: key people are missing from this. Maybe we should look at that.

The Chair, Basil McCrea, talked about the plight of the most disadvantaged and most vulnerable young people in our community. If this debate is about anything, it is about recognising young people, particularly the most vulnerable in our community. Let me just quote a young person who took part in an Include Youth initiative. I feel that this really sums up today's debate. Kelly, aged 20, said:

"I was 12 when I went into foster care, 14 when I went into a children's home, 17 when my father died and 19 when my mum died. In 2010, I got involved with the Give and Take scheme" —

we do not support that scheme, which is another issue that I will come to —

"and it was the best thing I have ever done, because, for me, I learned a lot about the type of person I want to be and the type of person I am capable of being."

What a statement. If we are about anything, it is about bringing that out in young people. She went on to say:

"The incentive of EMA would have been ideal for me as it would have driven me more. Why is it because I'm in care I was dubbed 'not worthy'?" —

that is a terrible indictment of us: a young person dubbed "not worthy" and made to feel such —

"That's why I started the Give and Take scheme to prove that just because you are in care doesn't mean you're not as important as everyone else."

Prevocational schemes, such as Give and Take, are not eligible for weekly non-means-tested education maintenance allowance. I know that we have raised the issue with the Minister and in Committee. Of course there are financial constraints. However, I would say that the most vulnerable in our community are the first people we should look at when talking about those types of scheme. It is not just about widespread schemes and education. For me, it is very much about coming together and taking a co-ordinated approach.

There are discussions at NICVA today about the welfare reform programme that is being handed down by the Westminster Government. We all know that that is coming down the track and that it will have a major negative impact on many of the most vulnerable communities. The

frustrating thing is that we can do very little about most of it, although we may be able to change and adapt some of it. We have an opportunity today, because we have it in our power to do something for our young people, particularly the most vulnerable. For me, this is about getting some sort of consensus on working together with the Minister. I certainly agree with Basil McCrea on this: with the dissolution of DEL, we should make sure that this is part of the legacy for any future Department. How we treat the most vulnerable in our community is how we will be judged by society now and when it comes to election time.

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately upon the lunchtime suspension. I therefore 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. We will then return to the debate, when the next Member to speak will be Barry McElduff.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.29 pm.

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

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Justice

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 7, 8 and 10 have been withdrawn. Written answers are required.

Prison Service: Enhanced Severance

1. **Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the terms and conditions of enhanced severance for prison officers. (AQO 1476/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The Civil Service compensation scheme is the statutory scheme that sets out the terms and conditions for benefits that are payable to civil servants who leave on grounds of redundancy or severance. The scheme's provisions include the immediate payment of pension; the immediate payment of the lump sum; and the immediate payment of lump sum compensation. Both the pension and the lump sum may be enhanced if the member leaves before their retirement age under the principal civil service pension scheme. In addition, the Prison Service agreed to pay compensation in lieu of notice up to a maximum of six months and an additional payment of nine months' basic salary.

Mr McMullan: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he confirm that it is lawful, ethical and desirable that his Department inserts as a condition of severance that those prison officers who will be awarded very generous golden handshakes under the scheme will not be eligible to reapply for jobs in the Prison Service? Will he bring forward regulations to prevent that from happening?

Mr Ford: I note Mr McMullan's concern and, indeed, that of other Members. I can simply advise him that the legal advice that I have received is that it would be discriminatory to prevent any of those who leave from applying for the new jobs that were advertised and for which the closing date was last week. I can, however, confirm that in the face of very significant potential recruitment, not one of the 151 officers who will leave service on 31 March 2012 was among around 5,000 applicants for the new posts.

Mr B McCrea: Minister, following the departure of Colin McConnell from his position of director general, can you outline how that will affect the staff exit scheme? Will you take the opportunity to explain how you intend to mitigate the loss of the person who was setting up the entire reform of the Prison Service?

Mr Ford: The answer to the question of how Colin McConnell's move to Edinburgh will affect the scheme is that it will not affect it in any way at all. Colin McConnell played a vital part in setting the foundations for the reform programme, which, as the House will know, follows through on the strategic efficiency and effectiveness programme and builds on the recommendations of the Owers team report. I want simply to pay tribute to the work that Colin McConnell did to establish

that. The fact that he served so well that he was selected for, effectively, the second most senior post in prisons in the United Kingdom to return to the Scottish Prison Service — a service that is three times bigger than ours and is based in his native Edinburgh — should come as no surprise to those who have seen the good work that Colin has done. However, another team is available of people who are also doing work. Reform was not being driven entirely by Colin McConnell. I have no doubt that when I discuss the arrangements for the appointment of a new director general with the permanent secretary, we will ensure that that post is filled as soon as possible in a way that will enable the current team to continue its work.

Mr A Maginness: I am not so certain that the departure of Mr McConnell, who is a very good man, is not anything other than a blow to reform. Given that the exit scheme is oversubscribed substantially, with over 500 applicants, how will the Minister manage the scheme over the next year or two?

Mr Ford: As I said earlier, 151 of the 544 applicants will be able to leave the service at the end of the month. Other moves will have to be managed in accordance with service's operational needs as replacement staff in the new grades come into post. It will be an issue for the Prison Service to manage suitable numbers of staff leaving as suitable numbers are brought into post. I cannot give the operational details of that at this stage. However, I assure the House that it will be managed in a way that will provide adequate staffing to ensure that the three prisons operate properly.

Mr S Anderson: All prison officers were told that they would be allowed to leave the service with respect and dignity, yet over 300 officers have been told that their leaving date is still under consideration. I know that the Minister has touched on it, but when will he be able to provide some certainty for those officers and give them a leaving date? Many have been left devastated —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question, please.

Mr S Anderson: When will the Minister be able to give those officers a leaving date? They have been left devastated by the mismanagement of that scheme from the very beginning.

Mr Ford: It is easy to talk about the mismanagement of the scheme from the beginning. I believe that officers were told that they would be able to leave with dignity, and they are able to leave with dignity. Anyone who suggested that we could allow 544 prison officers to walk out of the gate on the same date, on 31 March, really did not grasp the reality of the situation. A total of 151 officers will leave in March. The others will be told what their leaving date is as soon as they can be told so as to maintain the operational necessities of the service.

Prisons: Full-body Searches

2. **Mr Doherty** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the recent research carried out into full-body searching. (AQO 1477/11-15)

Mr Ford: The review of full-body imaging examined a number of areas, including the range of equipment and systems available; the manufacturers' performance claims; the threat profile that systems are designed to address; the application of systems in a prison environment; independent

operational assessments of performance and safety; maintenance and training costs; and options for the use of technology to augment or replace full-body searching in some circumstances or entirely.

Mr Doherty: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. Given that confidence can be placed in technology for airport security in places like Chicago, will the Minister explain why he has not yet moved to introduce similar technology for prison security in order to make full-body searches obsolete?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Doherty for his supplementary question. The answer is that we continue to work on the issue as we can. There is a difference between people travelling through airports once and those who are in prison for a significant period and who would have the opportunity, if the operation were not conducted successfully, to smuggle small quantities of inappropriate substances and build something up. I am not sure whether the kinds of machines being used in Chicago airport or in other areas of the United States would be licensed for use, in any circumstances, in the European Union or the UK.

Mr Campbell: Given that the campaign for the use of full-body imaging in prisons appears to be gaining some traction, will the Justice Minister spell out the dangers that that full-body imaging is attempting to thwart? Will he also spell out the problems that are being faced in prisons across the UK, and particularly here, given the threat that is posed by some of those in the jails?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Campbell for his question. I think that we are all aware of the threats that are posed. There is no doubt that attempts are made to smuggle in a variety of contraband materials in prisons in every part of the UK. Drugs, explosives, imitation firearms and the opportunity to build up replicas have all featured in prisons across the UK in recent years. The reality is that unless we have a system that guarantees that the technology can detect all the varieties of threats, we will not be able to ensure safety and security in the prisons by moving away from full-body searching. Moving away from full-body searching was a recommendation of the Owers report, and I am committed to implementing it. However, that must be done on the basis of maintaining the safety and security of prisoners and prison staff.

Mr McCallister: Will the Minister outline whether similar schemes have been carried out in any prisons throughout the world? If so, how successful have they been?

Mr Ford: I am grateful to Mr McCallister for his question, although in asking me to examine the situation across the world, I think that he has given me slightly more responsibility than the House has. I am not aware of any use of technology that has averted the need for full-body searching anywhere in the United Kingdom. As I informed the House previously, work is ongoing in a prison in Yorkshire on the opportunity to develop a technological solution. The Prison Service is keeping in touch with that work, and we are committed to seeing whether we can build on and use the lessons established by that research.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister for his replies so far. Will he acknowledge that the number one priority must be to continue to reduce the tension that exists, particularly in Roe House in Maghaberry prison? Will he report to the

House on his most recent visit to Portlaoise prison and on the searching arrangements in that prison?

Mr Ford: I appreciate that Mr Ramsey has been looking at the options over the past months. I visited Portlaoise prison a few weeks ago, as I did Birmingham a few weeks before that, to see the way in which searches are carried out. There are differences between the Portlaoise system and the system that the Northern Ireland Prison Service has, not least the presence of a company-strength detachment of the Irish defence forces in Portlaoise prison. That is not something that would be acceptable in Northern Ireland. I will discuss the details of that review, alongside the technology review, when I meet senior Prison Service officials in the coming weeks.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before I call the next Member, I reluctantly remind Members to be brief and to focus on one question to the Minister.

PSNI: Managed Services Contract

3. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the discussions between his Department and the PSNI on the arrangements for financing and retendering the managed services contract for the PSNI. (AQO 1478/11-15)

Mr Ford: The PSNI submitted a business case for the supply of support services to my Department for approval in December 2011, as Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) approval is not required. The business case examines how the future delivery of the supply of support services to the PSNI will satisfy its existing and future operational needs. Existing support services provided through outsourcing include security guarding, CCTV monitoring, custody detention officers, driving services and call handling, among others. The preferred option is to contract for further support functions in addition to those, including safety camera administration, fixed penalty processing, property management, courier services, and dispatch and controller services.

The value of the contract over the initial three years is £69.3 million, with, potentially, two further contract extensions of two years each. That is an increase above the current contract, which is valued at £42.3 million over the three-year term. My officials reviewed the business case and granted initial approval for the PSNI to advertise in the Official Journal on 2 February, while finalising conditions of approval. Business case approval was granted on 24 February, subject to certain conditions linking the project to the PSNI's efficiency savings programme.

Mr Ó hOisín: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. Will the Minister confirm that under the Police Act 1998, he has the authority to regulate such contracts? Given the huge public outcry over the rehiring of retired police officers, will he tell us what proportion of the £180 million that has been set aside will not go into that old boys' network?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Ó hOisín for his question. However, the role of the Department is to approve the business case on the grounds of value for money and affordability; it is not involved in policy. It is for the police to determine the policy. The Policing Board's resources and improvement committee receives regular updates on that business case. My Department does not interfere in the issue of how it is

administered. That is a matter that lies solely within the responsibilities of the Police Service and the Chief Constable.

Mr Givan: Will the Minister congratulate what has been termed as the old boys' network for the work that it does to combat, specifically, dissident republicans and the terrorist campaign that they wish to wage? Will he comment on discussions that his Department has had with the police about strategic reserves and the need for the Police Service to have greater flexibility in how it manages its budget?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Givan for his question, but, as ever, I think that he is trying to encourage me to stray a little bit into the operational responsibilities of the police. My job is to support the resourcing of the police, not to run the Police Service. It is certainly not to interfere with the operational responsibilities of either the Chief Constable or the Policing Board. However, it is absolutely clear that the Police Service has a very difficult task to do at present in building proper neighbourhood community policing, alongside the threat that it faces. We should support the PSNI as it carries out that work.

2.15 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members should not encourage the Minister to stray from the question.

Mr Nesbitt: I very much encourage the Minister to give me a direct answer to the question. He said that DFP approval was not required for the business case. What is his comment on that, and does that suggest that DFP approval is an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy?

Mr Ford: I really think that Mr Nesbitt should ask the Minister of Finance and Personnel that question. There are certain areas in which DFP approval is required for business cases, and there are certain other areas in which it is not required. It is not required in this case.

Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005

4. **Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the original scope and extent of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005. (AQO 1479/11-15)

Mr Ford: In 2004, the Government published a White Paper, 'One Step Ahead: A 21st Century Strategy to Defeat Organised Crime'. The Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005 implemented the legislative proposals of the White Paper and established the Serious and Organised Crime Agency (SOCA). The powers contained in the legislation were for use across all law enforcement agencies: the police, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, SOCA and the UK Border Agency.

The powers contained in the 2005 Act provide law enforcement with enhanced powers of confiscation in respect of the proceeds of crime investigations. They also provide for the use of financial reporting orders, which allow the courts to impose obligations on people convicted of specified offences to report the particulars of their financial affairs. The legislation also introduced a statutory framework for the use of assisting offenders.

Mr Elliott: Thank you, Minister, for that response. Obviously, the prosecution of serious crime is a complex operation, so does the Minister believe that the legislation in place is sufficient to deal with it? If not, what does he propose to do about it?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Elliott for his supplementary question. It has not been suggested to me by any of the relevant agencies or the judiciary that there is any need to change the legislation, but, as ever, I remain open to suggestions from any quarter.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. The Minister said that none of the agencies has asked him to review the legislation. In light of the recent court case, about which, as the Minister knows, there is a lot of public concern, perhaps the time is now appropriate —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question, please.

Mr McCartney: Sorry. Is the time now appropriate to review the legislation, given the concern of the McIlwaine family about the case that the Minister cited as a paragon of virtue?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr McCartney for his question. For the benefit of the House, that issue dominated a certain amount of my discussion with the Justice Committee last week. I accept that there are Members who are unhappy with anything that they regard as supergrass legislation. I believe that what we have under the 2005 Act is very different from what happened 30 years ago. There is a clear process whereby assisting offenders are identified, prosecuted and receive an appropriately reduced sentence before proceedings are taken against others. There is also the opportunity for cases to be referred back to the courts if it is felt that assisting offenders have failed to live up to their obligations under their signed contract. It was made absolutely clear by the Director of Public Prosecutions that he has asked a senior lawyer to examine the most recent trial to determine whether the Stewart brothers complied with their obligation to give honest evidence in that case. He has made it clear that he will follow up on that, as is his responsibility.

Mr Eastwood: May I press you a bit further, Minister, given the recent controversy that Members have spoken about before? Will you detail your conversations or meetings with any of the other agencies to look at potential reform?

Mr Ford: Since the court judgement to which Mr Eastwood refers, I have had a telephone conversation with the director. I have not discussed the issue with other agencies, but I have made it clear publicly that I am open to representation from any of them. Indeed, I have made it clear publicly that had there been anything in the judgement of the court that day, I would have been open to considering the legislation. Similarly, if the Justice Committee or any other body in this House were to put forward proposals, I would examine them seriously.

Multiagency Risk Assessment Conferences Operational Group

5. **Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the work of the multiagency risk assessment conference operational group since its inaugural meeting in September 2011. (AQO 1480/11-15)

Mr Ford: Multiagency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) have been in place now for just over two years, and I believe that they have achieved a considerable amount. From their inception until the end of January this

year, the 14 MARACs across Northern Ireland discussed 2,990 high-risk cases, and safety plans were put in place to protect the victims, which also involved 4,187 children.

The MARAC operational group was established on 26 September last year to ensure that a high standard of practice and a consistent approach were adopted in MARACs across Northern Ireland and to address practical delivery issues. It has met on three occasions since inception, and future meetings will be held at least quarterly.

Membership covers all key organisations involved in the strategic and operational side of MARAC. A wide range of issues have been discussed to date at the MARAC operational group meetings, which are chaired by the local domestic violence partnerships. However, I am conscious that some work remains to be implemented, and the representation at the operational group by policy officials maintains the link between the operational group and the strategic groups that have overall oversight of the MARAC initiative.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for his reply. I also thank him for his help with the issues that I have brought to him on a regular basis, particularly this one. One of my concerns that he is well aware of is that even though we have had the establishment of the MARACs, the information-sharing protocol has still not been put in place. Does the Minister not feel that having that operational protocol in place is key to the delivery of this set of circumstances so that it can be of help and assistance to MARACs in that much-needed process for victims?

Mr Ford: It is nice to have the opportunity to thank a Member for his question and, indeed, his comments of support for the work of the Department. I will make the most of it; it does not happen often at Question Time.

Mr Storey asked specifically about the information-sharing agreement. That issue has been complex and has taken some detail to follow through. The Police Service has been taking the lead on that, and it is my understanding that the finalisation of that document is now with the MARAC operational group, so I hope that we will be able to give him a very definite answer in the near future.

Mr Copeland: If possible, can the Minister please give me an update on his assessment of the work of the independent domestic violence advisers (IDVAs) in Northern Ireland?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Copeland for his question. Unfortunately, he has managed to put his finger on an area where progress has not been as rapid as we had hoped. The development of the business case for IDVAs has been more problematic than was at first anticipated by the funders, and there has been an examination of the existing policies across the UK to see how to make the best use of them in Northern Ireland. We are now at the stage where a procurement exercise is being taken forward together by the funding agencies, which are my Department, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Police Service.

Mr McDevitt: I join Mr Storey in acknowledging the great opportunity that MARACs present for tackling issues and putting in place support for vulnerable children. However, will the Minister acknowledge that progress is not as speedy as it should be on the full implementation of MARACs and that it is not just the information protocols or the specific officers who Mr Copeland referred to that are still outstanding? Can

the Minister assure the House that he will take a personal interest at Executive level in trying to unblock some of the unnecessary bureaucratic blockages —

Mr Deputy Speaker: One question please.

Mr McDevitt: — that have emerged?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister has been asked two questions; he can choose which one he answers.

Mr Ford: In fairness, Mr McDevitt makes a serious point, and I endeavoured in my initial response to Mr Storey to make it clear that although I believe that MARACs have been a positive story, they have not been perhaps as speedy as we would have hoped and there have been operational difficulties in bringing together the different agencies. I can, however, give him a commitment that the issue of ensuring that MARACs work well is a priority for my Department and for me, and I will ensure that we manage the system as well as we can in the future. Given the difficult issues that MARACs have to deal with and given the complexity of the arrangements between different agencies, we are committed in the Department of Justice to ensuring that they work as well as they possibly can.

Rural Crime

6. **Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Justice what action he is taking to tackle the problem of rural crime. (AQO 1481/11-15)

Mr Ford: The forthcoming community safety strategy will support efforts to make rural communities safer through preventing and reducing rural crime. At a local level, community safety partnerships deliver initiatives in rural areas across Northern Ireland that contribute to the reduction of crime, fear of crime and antisocial behaviour. Examples of initiatives to prevent and reduce rural crime include neighbourhood watch and rural watch schemes, trailer-marking schemes, data tagging for trailer quad marking, farmer text message schemes and crime prevention advice to rural groups.

A number of events and initiatives have been held in the Member's constituency of North Antrim, including, for example, a number of trailer-marking sessions, including in Ballymoney, Moyle and Ballymena, with another scheduled for Ballymoney later this month; a number of Construction and Agricultural Equipment Security and Registration (CESAR) tractor security-marking events across the entire North Antrim area, and another one is scheduled for Ballymoney in early April; farmer text-message schemes across the Moyle district; and a rural crime seminar held recently by police in H district in Garvagh to discuss rural crime and rural networks.

Just last week, I met the sector inspector in Ballymoney, and I heard at first hand about some of the rural crime initiatives being taken there, including an initiative called Farm Gate, which involves neighbourhood policing teams calling with farmers to glean useful information about involvement in rural crime and to provide crime prevention advice and reassurance to the farming community.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for his answer. He obviously did his homework before coming. In relation to Farm Gate, which involves police officers taking anecdotal evidence

from individual farmers, what judicial use will that be, should they come up with useful information?

Mr Ford: Mr Swann raises a perfectly reasonable question. I am glad that he acknowledges that I did my homework, although I do it for other people as well. The reality is that the police have to act on a variety of information, some of which is intelligence of a quality suitable for criminal prosecution and some of which may simply help to build an information case that can be followed through. That is an operational decision for the police. The key issue in this case is active work by the local neighbourhood teams, engaging with farmers and addressing some of the concerns that have been current in recent weeks.

Mr G Robinson: Does the Minister agree that the possible closure of some rural police stations, namely, in Dungiven and Garvagh in my constituency, could impact on possible fear of crime?

Mr Ford: Mr Robinson addresses the fact that there may be an issue of fear of crime. What Members need to do is address the reality of rural crime. Rural crime is not dealt with by having police officers sitting behind desks. Rural crime is addressed by the work that the Chief Constable has done in the past year or so, putting 600 officers out on the streets in response teams and neighbourhood teams. That is the best way of achieving it. Of course, the decision as to which stations are required for operational reasons is for the Chief Constable, and the decision on disposal of unused stations is one for the Policing Board.

Mr Allister: Does the Minister not recognise that the present proposal for the wholesale closure of rural police stations is sending out the wrong message — a message of encouragement to the perpetrators of rural crime and a message of discouragement to their victims? Having officers stationed behind a desk 20 or 30 miles away is little comfort to those who are the subject of the present outbreak.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Could we have the question, please?

Mr Allister: Does he not agree that having officers stationed 20 or 30 miles away behind a desk is a source of great annoyance and discomfort to the victims of those crimes?

Mr Ford: I think the greatest comfort we can have for our people is that which I highlighted earlier — the Chief Constable putting 600 officers out on the streets.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Does he recognise that rural crime is largely concentrated on the theft of tractors, diggers and farm machinery in general? Given that that is a major problem in parts of County Derry and County Tyrone, is any consideration being given to an expansion of the rural neighbourhood scheme?

2.30 pm

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Byrne for what is an entirely reasonable question, but it is not an issue for me as Minister, although I understand that the issue is being followed up actively by the police in a number of districts. That is why I highlighted, for example, the text messaging service that feeds into a neighbourhood watch scheme that is being administered in Moyle district. Where incidents arise or there are suspicions, the police have the capacity to inform a large number of rural dwellers by a simple text message to look out for

issues of particular concern. That kind of thing shows good work and a different way of doing it in rural areas to what would have been a traditional neighbourhood watch in an urban or suburban area.

Regional Development

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 1 and 3 have been withdrawn and require a written answer.

Conservation: Traffic Restrictions

2. **Mrs Hale** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the traffic restrictions that could be put in place under the Road Traffic Regulation (NI) Order 1997 to ensure that the existing character of a road and adjacent historical properties is protected from heavy vehicular traffic. (AQO 1492/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): My Department's Roads Service has advised that, under article 4 of the Road Traffic Regulation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, the Department may make an order that prevents the use of the public road by vehicular traffic of a kind or in a manner that is unsuitable having regard to the existing character of the road or adjoining property. However, my officials further advise that, when considering the introduction of a prohibition in respect of heavy vehicles, they must have due regard to the availability of a suitable alternative route and the potential impact on local businesses.

In practice, it has been found that, in many cases, no alternative route is deemed suitable for larger vehicles, for example, on narrow rural roads or residential streets. It has also been found that, on occasions, businesses that are located along the road may be wholly dependent on larger vehicles being able to access their premises directly for delivery or distribution purposes. Prohibiting such vehicles could prevent those businesses from operating. In addition, heavy traffic may already be using the most appropriate route, and, if diverted, issues associated with that traffic could transfer from one road to another. As a consequence, Roads Service generally explores other options that could lead to voluntary control, including the improvement of existing directional signage and the erection of additional advisory signage to guide large and heavy commercial vehicles away from the area; the establishment of a preferred route network for large heavy commercial vehicles; and seeking the co-operation of lorry operators and/or transport agencies with a view to reaching agreement on possible routes and times of operation.

Mrs Hale: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he assure the House that, where roads and adjoining historical and listed buildings come under threat from heavy vehicular traffic of a certain kind, he will do all in his power to ensure that the appropriate means are put in place to preserve and protect those buildings from damage?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the honourable lady for her question. She has been in regular correspondence and meetings with me on the issue, particularly in and around Hillsborough. I assure you that Roads Service will give every consideration to ameliorating and dealing with heavy vehicular traffic. She and other elected representatives for

that area are aware of the particular and peculiar issues in respect of Hillsborough village. We continue to look at those issues to see what measures we can bring forward.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Does the Minister have any plans to review criteria for all traffic-calming measures in built-up areas? I think specifically of small villages such as Kilskeery in County Tyrone.

Mr Kennedy: Kilskeery in County Tyrone has severe problems — *[Laughter.]* It has the honour of being represented by Mr McElduff, which is a disadvantage from the start. I need to be careful because there are cost implications of introducing such changes. There is a well-designated system by which traffic-calming measures are assessed. If the Member wishes to correspond with me directly to try to address the issues surrounding Kilskeery, I am happy to look at anything that we can do to improve the situation.

Mr Byrne: Is the Minister or the Department considering bringing in new speed restrictions, particularly in major towns that may have more pedestrians and cyclists than in the past?

Mr Kennedy: Traffic-calming cases are done on an individual area, town or village basis. My officials will actively look at whether improvements are necessary and at what stage we can bring them forward. I assure the Member that we are encouraging other modes of transport, including cycling and perhaps walking, to encourage people to lead a healthier lifestyle and to be less reliant on cars and vehicles.

Street Lighting Cables

4. **Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department is taking to prevent the theft of street lighting cables, particularly in rural areas. (AQO 1494/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. The theft of street lighting cables is an abhorrent and dangerous activity that must be condemned by all right-thinking people. Contrary to the opinion of some, it is not a victimless crime, and it shows a flagrant disregard for elderly and other vulnerable individuals who are likely to be inconvenienced when street lighting is not functioning. My Department's Roads Service is liaising closely with the PSNI to assist in the investigation of street lighting cable thefts, and I urge all members of the public with any information on such activities to bring it to the attention of the PSNI.

Roads Service has introduced measures aimed at combating this crime. Among the steps taken to date, it has changed the way new street lighting cables are laid to make them more difficult to steal. In addition, cables at certain locations have been marked with special smart DNA grease that allows stolen cables to be identified. Roads Service has also investigated the possible use of CCTV monitoring and remote alarm systems to protect cable installations. However, those options have proved to be prohibitively expensive for widespread use. My officials will continue to engage with the PSNI and take appropriate measures to prevent further cable thefts.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he agree that it is a case of the sooner that legislation is brought forward to regulate scrap metal dealers and make it

easier for the police to trace who is committing this heinous crime the better?

Mr Kennedy: That is a helpful suggestion that I am happy to take on board and on which, perhaps, I will consult Executive colleagues on how best to progress. It is unacceptable that so many such incidents — 76 separate incidents in total — have resulted in street lighting cable thefts. It is not a victimless crime, and anyone with any information should inform the PSNI. Roads Service officials will continue to work with the PSNI. The Member's suggestion is helpful, and I will explore methods of achieving it.

Mr Copeland: The Minister will be aware that not only cabling, but grills, manhole covers and anything that can be broken up, cut down or stolen is being removed. Does he agree that the wider issue of metal theft is a cross-cutting issue in the Executive? In light of that, will he — to echo what my colleague has just said — encourage the Environment Minister and the Justice Minister to consider legislating to make it easier to trace those involved in the business of stolen scrap metal —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am sure that the Minister has got the gist of your question.

Mr Copeland: — and to reduce the potential for profit from dealing in stolen metal?

Mr Kennedy: The point has been amplified by the Member's comments, and I will seek to co-operate and liaise with Executive colleagues, initially through discussions. I can tell the House that the cost of replacing the stolen cables and repairing the associated damage is estimated to be in the region of £330,000, so it is a serious issue. The scrap value of the stolen cables is substantially less than the replacement costs. It represents a challenge, and I and my officials — I hope in conjunction with other Departments, Ministers and their officials — can look at measures to address all issues of theft. It is public property that is being stolen, and the taxpayer is expected to underwrite those costs.

Mr Eastwood: Can the Minister give us a geographical breakdown of the locations of the thefts? He mentioned a figure of 76: I could probably take him to 76 lamp posts in Derry that have been attacked. A geographical breakdown would be great.

Mr Kennedy: We will not ask for a DNA readout from the Member. That was a joke, by the way, just in case the Justice Minister is in any way interested.

There have been 76 cases, as I said, mostly in the northern and western divisions. There have been around 61 cases in the northern division of Roads Service and 15 in the western division. Clearly, it represents a serious challenge. I am happy to say that neither the eastern nor southern divisions have been affected to date. I am always cautious about giving out such information because it is not only law-abiding people who watch 'Stormont Live' or see these debates. It is an issue that we will concentrate on in the areas most affected at this point. Any assistance that the Member and his colleagues can give will be greatly appreciated.

A26 and Dungiven Bypass

5. **Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he can give an assurance that an upgrade of the

A26 and a decoupled Dungiven bypass will be included in his Department's business case for the development of roads. (AQO 1495/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member that the business case for a major roads project is provided on an individual basis and evolves as a scheme is developed. The final business case is normally compiled when a scheme has been defined, following the public inquiry process, and is submitted to the Department of Finance and Personnel for approval, prior to moving to the construction stage. That is in accordance with the process agreed with DFP.

As the Member is aware, I have reviewed spending priorities across my Department, and I am pleased that sufficient funding has been allocated to allow me to bring forward a balanced programme of improvements to our strategic road network that will make a significant difference to the people of Northern Ireland. I can assure the House that development work will continue on the A26 Glarryford to A44 Drones Road dualling, the A6 Randalstown to Castledawson scheme and the A6 Londonderry to Dungiven scheme. However, delivery of those projects will be determined by the investment strategy for Northern Ireland 2011-2021, on which consultation recently concluded.

Mr G Robinson: I thank the Minister. As both projects will greatly enhance access to the north-west and north coast of Northern Ireland, does the Minister agree that both schemes will benefit our tourist industry and infrastructure and will encourage more inward investment in both areas?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question, and I acknowledge the benefits that both the A6 and a scheme such as the A26 would bring in economic terms for the movement of goods and services and for tourism, especially with so many events taking place later this year and next in the north-west. However, I must remind the Member that all those things are subject to available finance. As roads Minister, I want to promote the opportunities that we have to assist the construction industry, and the recent announcement of the expenditure of half a billion pounds on a balanced programme of road schemes across Northern Ireland has helped to do that. However, I also look to the investment strategy for future opportunities to bring forward projects such as those the Member raised.

2.45 pm

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister confirm that development work will be in place for the provision of a park-and-ride scheme in Dungiven before any announcement of the A6 Dungiven bypass?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. I know that he has consistently lobbied for the Dungiven bypass in particular. I very much hope that, as part of any strategic improvement, issues such as park-and-ride facilities will be factored into the equation. We will continue to progress all the schemes along with the draft statutory orders being published and last December's environmental statement for the Londonderry to Dungiven section of road. We will move those on as far as we can. Again, however, available finance will be a key issue, and I cannot ignore that reality. I very much hope that all sections of the House, every party and all Members will bear that in mind as we move forward to consider the ISNI document and proposals.

Mr Lyttle: Will the Minister update the House on the progress of the public inquiry into the proposed A55 Knock Road upgrade?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his interest in that ongoing matter. Again, finance will be a big factor in the eventual outcome. Nevertheless, we are seeking to move forward all the statutory processes to be in a position to have that, along with other schemes, ready on the grid for progress.

Traffic Wardens

6. **Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister for Regional Development what training traffic wardens receive in relation to implementing the legislation they are enforcing. (AQO 1496/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Traffic attendants are employed by NSL Services Group, the private company currently contracted by Roads Service to provide parking enforcement and car park management services. Roads Service has advised that all traffic attendants undergo induction training that covers all aspects of their role and includes instruction on the legislation under which they operate. Initial training is followed up by on-site training with an experienced traffic attendant and a three-month probation period.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his reply. May I urge him to ask NSL to be sensitive and use discretion where necessary in its training of traffic wardens? At times, the law is strictly enforced but without any discretion to, for example, the elderly and those who may be disabled. I emphasise that to you. There is the egregious example of a Blood Transfusion Service van that was parked outside —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Is there a question, please?

Mr A Maginness: — Larne town hall and received a parking ticket.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member and understand his point. However, the role of a traffic attendant is not without its challenges. They are not popular people, almost akin to Members of the House — *[Interruption.]* Well, so it seems. However, I assure the Member that the training provided to traffic attendants is to ensure that they carry out their duties in a fair and equitable manner in towns and places across Northern Ireland. I have no doubt that they achieve that in large part. Obviously, common sense plays a huge role in performing those important duties.

Lord Morrow: Following the withdrawal of traffic wardens from certain areas of Northern Ireland, including sections of west Belfast, after threats were received, will the Minister update the House on the current position? Will he also tell us what discussions he has had with the PSNI and the Minister of Justice on the issue?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. It is important that traffic attendants are allowed to perform their duties, wherever those duties take them. We are absolutely clear about that. I am happy to consult the Minister of Justice and, as issues are raised or events occur, to undertake any requirement to consult the PSNI. For traffic attendants, we simply cannot tolerate intimidation or any sense that there would be a no-go area. It is difficult but necessary work to ensure that traffic flows are maintained and illegal parking is controlled.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister tell us the assessment criteria for the provision of traffic wardens in towns and villages?

Mr Kennedy: If the Member is looking for traffic wardens, that is genuinely a new one. The deployment of attendants depends on locations and traffic difficulties in a particular town or village. An assessment is made, areas are identified, and attendants are given duties in accordance with the agreed beats. Beats and their frequency are targeted at locations in which illegal parking is most prevalent and causes most difficulties. While on patrol, traffic attendants are expected to issue penalty charge notices to vehicles that they detect as being illegally parked. If the Member is concerned about illegal parking in a particular town or village, I am happy to hear from him and to pass on the necessary information.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Mr David McClarty for a question.

Mr McClarty: Question 8.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Apologies. I am sorry to disappoint, but it is Mr Steven Agnew.

Mr Agnew: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Question 7, which, I believe, comes before question 8. *[Laughter.]*

Cycling

7. **Mr Agnew** asked the Minister for Regional Development how much of the £500 million investment in sustainable modes of transport, as indicated in the draft Programme for Government, will be directed at promoting cycling and improving the cycling infrastructure. (AQO 1497/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Mr Deputy Speaker, the Back Benches are in revolt. I was careful not to say that the Back Benches are revolting, in case I end up there — again.

I fully recognise the central role that transport plays in underpinning a successful regional economy, including the provision of public transport services. Our transport strategy proposes to move towards greater sustainability and to help to grow the economy. I recently provided the Member with details of how my Department proposes to allocate the £500 million over the Budget period. That includes projects to improve the railway network and the purchase of new trains and buses.

As for the promotion of cycling and the improvement of the cycling infrastructure, the investment includes over £3 million for active travel demonstration projects. It is intended that the projects will show how active travel can be successfully promoted and higher levels of walking and cycling achieved. The provision of a cycling infrastructure will be considered as part of any projects arising. Local councils have recently been invited to submit applications for that capital funding. Cycling has benefited from several years of investment in the cycling infrastructure, as set out in the regional transport strategy, and the Belfast metropolitan transport plan is well established.

With regard to the provision of cycle paths until 2015, I can advise that the detailed budget has not yet been finalised, and it is, therefore, not possible to provide details of future work programmes at this time. However, it remains my Department's intention to continue to implement, so far as

resources permit, the cycling infrastructure as set out in the BMTP and the RTS, which will complement the existing national cycle network.

Mr Agnew: Mr Deputy Speaker, thank you for not being churlish despite my comments. I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he agree that the prohibition of bikes on trains during morning rush hour is an impediment to more active transport and travel?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for raising that issue. It is an operational matter for Translink, but I will raise it with Translink once again and write to him with a detailed response.

Mr Beggs: In respect of improving the cycling infrastructure, will the Minister confirm that there is provision for cycleways in the A2 Greenisland scheme? That will link the east Antrim area to the greater Belfast network, and people will be able to cycle safely to Comber, Belfast and Lisburn.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. He is a noted cyclist and has been a regular winner of the Stormont cycle race. His long-standing issue has been the upgrade of the A2. Three weeks ago, we were very pleased to make that positive announcement, and I am pleased today to indicate that cycle lanes and opportunities for cyclists on that new stretch of road will be available, and he can cycle merrily to wherever he wishes.

Mr Dickson: What progress has been made in respect of the public hire of bicycles, particularly in Belfast city centre and other towns across Northern Ireland?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I am sure that the Member's commitment to cycling is intense.

I am interested in reshaping the transport that people use, especially in central Belfast, so that we can deal with some of the regular gridlock that occurs. An obvious way is to encourage cycling. That will mean that bicycles will become readily available at various points. I recently visited Dublin, which I am now allowed to do, and we looked at the arrangements there for cycling.

Mr A Maginness: It is a slippery slope.

Mr Kennedy: It is all-one way traffic. *[Laughter.]* They have a programme to encourage cycling and allow cyclists to hire bicycles at a very moderate cost and have the opportunity to cycle round the capital city of that jurisdiction.

Runkerry Development: Infrastructure

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr David McClarty, your time has finally come.

Mr McClarty: Mr Deputy Speaker, while I voice concerns for your numeracy skills, I will ask question 8.

8. **Mr McClarty** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his plans on the infrastructure around the new Runkerry development on the Causeway Coast. (AQO 1498/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has no significant infrastructure plans relating to the proposed new

development at Runkerry, which includes a golf course, hotel and 75 holiday homes. However, the applicant will construct a full, standard right-turn lane at the new access, together with a new footway link to Bushmills village.

A major Northern Ireland Water scheme was recently completed on the B146 Causeway Road. After the warranty period for those works expires in May 2013, Roads Service plans to resurface the Causeway Road from its junction with Whitepark Road to the Giant's Causeway site, subject to the availability of funding at that time.

Mr Deputy Speaker: There is just time to apply your literacy skills in a supplementary question.

Mr McClarty: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thank the Minister for his response. There is concern that the proposed development will impact negatively on the natural surroundings. How will the Minister's Department ensure that the infrastructure work leading to the new development will blend into the environment while allowing sufficient access?

3.00 pm

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary. Obviously, in consideration as a major consultee to that planning application, now approved, which, I think, was welcomed by all sides of the House, Roads Service had a significant input. Undoubtedly, we will want to see the improvements brought forward sensitively and mindful of the environmental issues of that location. I have no doubt that my officials will carry that work forward.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes a highly entertaining Question Time for the Minister for Regional Development.

Private Members' Business

Educational Assistance for Young People

Debate resumed on amendment to motion:

That this Assembly notes the good work being done by further education colleges, as well as by schools; and calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to establish a working group, comprising officials from the Department for Social Development, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the South Eastern Regional College and the PSNI to identify ways of improving access to further education for young people experiencing health, social and housing problems by addressing any barriers that exist in these areas. — [Mr Easton.]

Which amendment was:

Leave out all after "working group," and insert

"as part of a wider delivery mechanism to support the forthcoming Executive strategy for young people not in employment, education or training, comprising officials from the Department for Social Development, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, all further education colleges and the PSNI, to identify ways of improving access to further education for young people experiencing a range of personal and social barriers." — [Mr Lyttle.]

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Our party believes that the motion and the amendment are well meaning in their general intent; there is no doubt about that. However, as has been expressed by a number of contributors, we cannot for the life of us understand why the South Eastern Regional College alone is mentioned in the motion. Even party colleagues of the group of proposers have made that point. If there is one thing I cannot endure or stand, it is parochialism. [Laughter.] So I cannot stand that emphasis on one subregional college.

At least the Alliance Party amendment tried to tidy one aspect of the motion, and it made reference to all the FE colleges. However, there is still no reference to the Department of Education (DE), when it strikes me as being very obvious that there is a major role for the Department of Education in the matter. In the subgroup of Ministers that the proposers envisage joining Minister Farry, it appears that they have eyes only for Nelson and Arlene and none for our John. The Department of Education definitely needs to be represented in any coming together. It is a glaring omission.

It is a particularly glaring omission, from the proposer's point of view, when you read a very sensible construction of a letter from Mervyn Storey MLA, Chairperson of the Education Committee, to Tom Elliott, Chair of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), regarding the Programme for Government. It identifies gaps in the PFG. The letter says that numeracy and literacy, which we have just discussed, should be dealt with as a continuum from early years through to the adult learner. The Education Committee believes that the present split between the literacy and numeracy strategy, which has been developed in the Department of Education, and the essential skills strategy, which has been developed

in the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), is unhelpful. That came from a letter from the DUP Chair of the Education Committee to the Chair of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister on 18 January. That points up again why DE needs to be involved in any joined-up efforts here.

Of course, we welcome the debate. Any debate that places a focus on tackling disengagement from education is inherently a good thing. Our party brought a motion on that to the Chamber in the past few weeks. The inquiry into young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) by the Committee for Employment and Learning, chaired by my colleague Sue Ramsey, in the previous mandate, made a huge contribution to this debate and has resulted in a greater focus among MLAs, the Assembly and, indeed, the Executive.

As we know, young people not engaging with education, employment or training tend to fall into one or more of the following categories: teenage parents, homeless young people or young people who might be carers. In that regard, we should highlight such issues as timekeeping, attendance at school, completing homework or being bullied, which can arise for young people who are carers, young people with mental health difficulties or physical and learning disabilities, or young offenders.

Another area that I want to emphasise is rural broadband, and the inadequacy of broadband in many rural communities in particular. Poor broadband provision meant that students in mid-Tyrone — Greencastle, Gortin and Broughderg, for example — could not sign up to a recent virtual learning week at their local FE college. That is another hurdle and barrier that needs to be highlighted.

Mr Wells: The Member, having condemned parochialism, takes us on an entangled tour of west Tyrone. I had never heard of Eskragh until he arrived in this Chamber. I have never been there but I certainly feel that I know it intimately as a result of his various speeches about it. However, he is simply incorrect about rural broadband. The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has signed a contract, on behalf of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), with Onwave, a company that now provides satellite broadband to every corner of Northern Ireland at a very reasonable cost. Therefore, there is absolutely no excuse whatsoever for any rural business to say now that it has not got high quality broadband. It is available and can be signed up to today.

Mr McElduff: I thank Mr Wells for his intervention. The broadband provision that you are talking about is obviously much more expensive, is not reliable and does not reach all quarters. For example, very often the antennae pick up only in areas where the satellite is in the sight line of a particular house. Every week, I deal with dozens of families in mid-Tyrone who face that problem.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr McElduff: I will move on because I have only about half a minute left.

It is not possible for young people to make the most of their training and educational opportunities if those hurdles prevail.

The education maintenance allowance (EMA) must be retained and improved so that available resources are targeted at those in greatest need. There does, of course, need to be maximum collaboration between Ministers and across Departments —

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

Mr McElduff: — if we are to bring about real change and make sure that the children who are NEET do not end up in that cycle of disadvantage.

Mr G Robinson: I welcome the debate, as it concentrates on the future of all our young people in Northern Ireland. I say that because young people are our future, and my contribution is based on that belief. I commend all the good work done by further education colleges and schools in the Province.

I am particularly pleased that the motion mentions a cross-departmental approach, which is essential in any proposals for improvement. Only with Departments working together can we ensure the very best outcome for our young people, especially in gaining qualifications at university or FE colleges.

I have said previously that I want to see skills matched with vacancies, but I also want every young person to have the opportunity to gain the skills that will maximise their employment chances. The motion aims for just that. Although the scheme outlined in the motion is a trial in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area, I am sure that the findings will apply throughout Northern Ireland.

There is high unemployment in my constituency. That is not an acceptable situation. Despite the attempts of the Enterprise Minister, inward investment is not easily forthcoming due to the harsh economic conditions that we are experiencing. That is why it is essential that every young person has the opportunity to maximise their practical skills set or academic qualifications. An interdepartmental approach gives every young person the best opportunity to do that.

I would also like to ensure that young people whose circumstances change, due perhaps to themselves or a parent losing a job, maintain their position in education. If a place is taken from a young person, surely we are only reinforcing poverty, isolation and unemployment.

I hope that all Members will support the motion and a bright future for our young people. I support the motion.

Mrs D Kelly: I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. Although the motion, as many Members have said, concentrates on the South Eastern Education and Library Board area, the difficulties and concerns, or paranoia, experienced by some around the nature of the debate tells us that there are some concerns about how DEL might be broken up. People are trying to fight a battle that is not yet before us.

I understand that the debate is very much about young people who find themselves in difficult situations and who have been failed by society as a whole. People are talking about the nature of the debate and the type of partnerships and are looking for solutions when the problem has arisen, instead of looking at prevention rather than the cure, where there is need for greater support for families and much earlier intervention. Therefore, the onus is on the Executive

to finally agree and publish a childcare strategy and to tell the Assembly, the people and the families in the North who is responsible for early years and nursery provision. The Executive failed to reach agreement on that in the previous mandate, and they have yet to reach agreement in this mandate.

In today's employment scene, at least one in four young people is unemployed and there is increased competition. Young people who left school with minimal qualifications and reduced life chances now face increased competition for every single job that is going. Many young graduates are now competing for the jobs that those young people would, historically, have been able to get. They are really at the bottom of the pile when it comes to employment chances. It is quite right for the motion to look for interdepartmental and cross-departmental co-operation and collaboration to meet the needs of those young people, albeit in a specific location.

Other Members talked about it being a pilot and how it might be something that others might aspire to and learn from. However, if people are being parochial, I can say that in my constituency of Upper Bann, the Southern Regional College has, since its inception, been a member of the five departments within the Department for Social Development's (DSD) neighbourhood renewal partnership boards in the southern regions, which are Armagh, Brownlow, Lurgan, Newry and Portadown. The total population is around 36,000, which amounts to 12% of the entire population of the area. Through engagement with DSD via those partnership boards, the college, in partnership with other statutory bodies, develops projects designed to meet local needs. The other partners include the Housing Executive, the local councils and the health and social care trusts. It would not be right to say that there are not existing partnerships and good practice out there already from which we can learn. Some of the initiatives that were funded and developed in those partnerships include Out of the Loop, where 90 homes were given computers and free broadband for three years.

At this point, I have to support Mr McElduff. In Aghagallon and Aghalee in my area, broadband quality and access is poor and patchy and, sometimes, access to good broadband services depends on the weather conditions.

There are also projects that mentor —

Mr F McCann: I thank the Member for giving way. Going to the heart of the motion and the amendment, which refer to areas where there are severe difficulties, social exclusion, poor housing and poor health, if you were starting a pilot, would it not be better to pick one of the worst areas so that you could see the difficulties that exist and try to do something about them, rather than pick an area where, as you say, it has more to do with parochialism than trying to improve the situation?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mrs D Kelly: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Last week, the Community Relations Council published a report that tells us in very stark terms the challenges that face this Executive and Assembly. Children are living in poverty and in poor conditions, where poverty and deprivation levels are increasing, older people are suffering from poverty and sectarianism remains a challenge. The welfare reforms that are envisaged by the Westminster Government will hit young people particularly hard. They will have less opportunity for

access to good housing and housing that is conducive to learning, given that even though they may wish to live alone, many of those young people may be forced into shared accommodation and, perhaps, will not have much control over who they will have to share that accommodation with.

3.15 pm

People who come here to look at whether they are going to invest and create jobs in the North talk about the skills, educational attainment and attitude of our workforce. Unfortunately, the Executive, who have placed the economy at the heart of the Programme for Government for the second time, are continuing to fail the workforce and not deliver. I accept that there is a worldwide recession, but —

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

Mrs D Kelly: — the number of people unemployed has increased almost threefold in the past five years.

Mrs Overend: The motion covers an extremely important aspect of our economy: the upskilling of our young people so that they can go out into the world with confidence and find a job, not only to improve their self-worth and gain job satisfaction but to enable them to better contribute to society. However, there is a need to recognise that there are various barriers and that many of our young people do not enter further education because of health, social or housing problems.

We have debated the issue of the EMA recently and how it should work to financially support our young people to remain in education. We have debated the issue of NEETs, many of whom could be facing barriers such as those previously mentioned. We have also debated youth unemployment and how one in five of our young people is without employment. That is a staggering figure. How many of those unemployed fail to secure a further level education?

Today, we are having yet another debate about our young people who are experiencing difficulties in accessing further education. That means one of two things: that we can talk all year about our teenagers and how we need to change and adapt structures in order to help them more or that it is time to take action on the issue. Perhaps it means both.

On 31 January 2012, I received confirmation from the Minister of Finance and Personnel that the Assembly received a whopping £26.5 million by way of a Barnett consequential as a result of the decision of the Department for Work and Pensions at Westminster to address youth unemployment under the Youth Contract. I urged the Minister then to bid for all of this money from the Executive to focus on Northern Ireland's high rate of youth unemployment, but we have not yet heard the details of those plans.

In trying to solve this ongoing problem, it would be useful to start at the beginning of a child's life and to make changes so that all our young people grow up to value education and see the positives that it can bring to individual lives. I would argue that the Department of Education is fundamental to tackling the issue seriously. As my colleague Basil McCrea, Chairman of the Committee for Employment and Learning, pointed out, we need a clear vision and strategy to run from the start to the finish of a child's time in our education system.

I support the amendment in what it aspires to do. Cross-agency and cross-departmental action plans and strategies have been advocated in the Ulster Unionist Party manifesto, which states:

"It is essential therefore that there be put in place an overarching strategy for ensuring that no one is left behind at any level of the educational system. The Departments of Education, Employment and Learning and Social Development must work together in order to catch the likely underachievers before they fall too far."

Furthermore, we suggested that this strategy should be one of the priorities of the new Programme for Government and that newly appointed Ministers should jointly commit to it at the time of their nominations.

Perhaps the delay in laying down a plan to tackle this problem is down to the outstanding issue of the dissolution of the Department for Employment and Learning and what the future holds for those responsibilities — possibly the formation of a Department of the economy? Such a joined-up Department may make issues such as the one that we are debating today easier to address.

I congratulate further education colleges on the sterling job that they have done so far. They have been targeting and attracting students of all abilities. We must always champion the schools and colleges that have been delivering for those of all abilities and encourage those who could be doing so much more. I believe that finding a unique place for everyone in our society should be a key driver for our colleges and could be a good motto for our education system.

I welcome the aim of tackling a range of social and personal barriers that could prevent or affect educational achievement. According to a report by Save the Children, child poverty levels are increasing in Northern Ireland. That has a massive impact on educational achievement and the number of barriers to achievement.

As my party's spokesperson for the economy, I feel that it makes no sense whatsoever to leave many of our children to slip further behind their peers. It creates economic damage despite our record GCSE and A-level results compared with the rest of the UK. Companies looking to invest in Northern Ireland take note of our rivals and the skilled workforces that they can offer. One simply has to look at the Scandinavian countries.

Only yesterday, we read in the 'Belfast Telegraph' that 40% of school leavers fail to achieve the target of five GCSEs, which is a minimum requirement for employers. We must seriously address the problem of underachievement and not simply pat ourselves on the back for the high achievers. I acknowledge that social and personal barriers are issues that need to be addressed, but we must look at the education system from start to finish and not simply pinpoint one area. Therefore, although I welcome and support the motion and amendment, I ask the Assembly —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mrs Overend: — to deliver what it promises: proper joined-up government. I urge the Employment and Learning Minister to take a strong lead on the issue sooner rather than later.

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning):

I welcome the opportunity to respond to the motion. Members' contributions confirm that this is regarded as a very important issue for the Assembly and wider society. As I said in a recent and not unrelated Assembly debate, I regard youth unemployment as one of the major issues facing our society. I have also emphasised the importance of individual opportunity and the need to ensure that every person gets the support and encouragement that they deserve to fulfil their potential. That has to be our number one aim. Therefore, right at the outset, I will say that I fully support the broad thrust of the motion in acknowledging the good work being done with our young people by schools and further education colleges. I am aware of the many examples of the very difficult health-related, social and behavioural problems that colleges help young people to deal with daily.

The transition from school to education, training or employment can be very stressful for young people at the best of times, but it is even more so for those who also face particular difficulties in their lives. The Careers Service has a pivotal role to play in that transition. All year 12 school pupils are offered an individual careers guidance interview to help them to decide on their career pathways. To support the inclusion of all hard-to-reach groups, the service works with a number of stakeholders who advocate on behalf of those young people to help them to access education, training or employment.

The motion calls on me to establish a working group to identify ways of improving access to further education for young people who face a number of barriers to participation. That is a very specific request — in fact, it may be too specific. There are risks in isolating that dimension from the wider range of issues to be addressed, and I will come to those shortly. Our extensive work over the past year or so on the wider issue of those not in education, employment or training — the so-called NEETs group — has shone the spotlight on the different and often multifaceted problems affecting some young people. Effective engagement with those young people will be a significant part of the solution.

Further education colleges offer a wide variety of opportunities to 16- to 18-year-olds. Around 31% of all DEL-funded FE enrolments are for people in that age group. The bulk of those enrolments are on regulated vocational courses, from entry level up to level 3, that are delivered on a full-time or part-time basis. In addition, colleges are significant providers of the Department's Training for Success programme. In fact, some 48% of the 9,000 or so under 19-year-olds on the different strands of that programme are college based. That means that over half of Training for Success is delivered by training suppliers. They also play a crucial role in engaging young people and helping them to overcome their barriers to participating in training.

Training for Success provides the Department's guarantee of training for all 16- and 17-year-olds who are not in education or employment. Skills for Your Life addresses the personal and development needs of young people who have disengaged from learning and/or have significant barriers to participation. The Skills for Work strand helps young people to gain skills and vocational qualifications at level 1 and to progress to higher-level training, including programme-led apprenticeships, or to further education or employment.

Young people coming into Training for Success, in particular the Skills for Your Life strand, can be given additional special support to overcome their problems and to develop. Training suppliers, including colleges, can work in conjunction with specialist support providers, such as Disability Action, Sensory Learning Support and Opportunity Youth, to name but a few. Of course, the age criteria for Training for Success have been extended to 22 for young people with a disability and to 24 for those leaving care. In addition, further education colleges are the major deliverers of essential skills courses in many areas of literacy, numeracy and ICT. Many young people face particular barriers in those areas and, where needed, essential skills courses are a mandatory element of further education provision for all 16- to 18-year-olds and of training provision.

Given the wide range of opportunities that they offer and their presence throughout the 45 main campuses and in communities across Northern Ireland, colleges play a vital role in encouraging young people, including those most at risk, to engage with education and training. Colleges have built strong partnerships with schools, communities and employers in their areas. However, importantly, colleges have also established very effective partnerships with health and social care trusts, other agencies and a wide range of voluntary and community organisations. For example, in partnership with the Prince's Trust, colleges deliver programmes that engage directly with difficult-to-reach young learners. In particular, they deliver the Team programme, which is a 12-week course for 16- to 24-year-olds that promotes personal development and engages young people in a range of confidence-boosting activities, including work placements. Participation in such programmes engenders positive attitudes that can encourage progression into further education, training or employment.

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

The work that colleges do in partnership with schools to deliver the vocational element of the entitlement framework is also extremely beneficial. The practical courses on offer do much to engage young people in vocational education and training. This positive introduction to what colleges have to offer can be a strong encouragement to young people, including those at risk of dropping out, to take up further education or training when they leave school. Colleges also play a key role in widening access for young people to higher education provision in Northern Ireland. Although we outperform the rest of the UK in that area, my Department's new widening participation strategy will see an enhanced role for the FE sector.

Of course, financial support is always a key issue. Members will be aware that my Department and the Department of Education are conducting a review of the education maintenance allowance. The outcome of that review will be important, particularly the desire to direct EMA support to those who need it most. It is interesting to note that around 40% of EMA recipients attend an FE college. However, colleges have other forms of financial support for students. First, all 16- to 18-year-olds, with the exception of international students, have access to free further education and do not pay fees. Secondly, the Care to Learn scheme provides childcare support for students who are young parents, and, thirdly, students under 19 who are living more than three miles from their local college can receive free transport. In addition, there is further support available

on a means-tested basis; for example, free meals and assistance towards the cost of clothing in relation to their course of study. There is also a hardship fund for students aged over 19 to provide assistance with fees, books, equipment and living costs. My Department also provides funding to colleges in order to support specialist provision for students with a learning disability or a physical disability.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for outlining a number of the different programmes in place. Given that the pilot project for the learner access and engagement programme was very successful in showing dividends, particularly for young people who had no qualifications, will the Minister now commit to mainstreaming that in the budget for the year ahead?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for her intervention. We are looking at that. I concur with the broad thrust of what she said. However, a separate decision has to be taken.

3.30 pm

Although it is important to find ways to improve access to education and training, it is equally important that young people are encouraged, motivated and supported to remain in college and to achieve the qualifications that they have set out to achieve. Crucial to that is ensuring that young people follow programmes of study that stimulate their interests and meet their career aspirations. That is why, as part of the induction process, every young person who starts at college agrees an individual learning plan that leads to relevant qualifications. That is then followed up with regular interviews with course tutors.

Unfortunately, colleges frequently have to address issues that can get in the way of a young person's ability to learn. Those issues range from financial constraints to a variety of social, health and behavioural problems. Colleges have been very successful in working with a range of agencies to address issues, such as drug and alcohol abuse, homelessness and mental health issues. They have also established effective partnerships with health and social care trusts to support young people in care or leaving care to be able to access courses that suit their needs.

Colleges have also given priority to staff development. Staff are given specialist training to work with young people who experience problems. Colleges also have ongoing contact with the Samaritans, the Housing Executive and Citizens Advice to assist learners who experience mental health problems, homelessness or debt issues. For example, staff in the South Eastern Regional College hold regular case conferences to identify young people who are most at risk and to agree a package of support to help them to continue and to achieve their qualifications. Other examples are the Belfast Metropolitan College and the North West Regional College, which have been awarded the Buttle UK charter mark for innovative and proactive work in helping young people from a care background to gain access to further and higher education.

In outlining the excellent work that colleges do, often in trying circumstances, I would not want to be in any way complacent. Clearly, considerable issues remain for a number of young people. That is why my Department has taken the lead in developing a cross-departmental NEET strategy. I want to stress that it is cross-departmental; it is an example of joined-up government. Many Members will

have participated in the debate on NEETs on 6 February and will appreciate the strong link between the discussion then and the debate today. Following extensive consultation and the Committee for Employment and Learning's inquiry, I will bring a final draft strategy on NEETs to the Executive in April. After that, I will make a full statement to the Assembly. My Department is finalising its contribution to ensure that we are doing all that we can to support young people to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the Department so that they can fulfil their potential. We are guided a great deal by the consideration and advice of the Committee and its members in that regard.

I have also put to the Executive a paper on youth unemployment, which remains under active consideration. That will also include actions that are aimed specifically at young people in the NEETs category. Obviously, that discussion has to be held in the Executive. Again, I commit to coming back to the Assembly to report on the way forward for policy when it is approved by the Executive. Of course, that will require additional resources. I suspect that that applies not only to my Department but to others. If the Assembly is serious about tackling youth unemployment and exclusion — and I believe that it is — rhetoric has to be matched by resources.

Returning to the specific question that was posed by the debate, namely the establishment of a working group to identify ways to improve access to further education for young people who face a number of problems, I want to raise a number of points. First, my NEETs paper to the Executive will include proposals on how to drive the implementation of the NEETs strategy at the highest level. For example, that might be through the current ministerial subcommittee for children and young people, which would give ministerial leadership to that most important of issues. A NEETs subgroup that is comprised of representatives from relevant Departments and stakeholder groups, informed by experts in the NEETs area and reporting directly to the ministerial subcommittee, would give added momentum and strategic direction. It would encompass the full range of Departments and policy responsibilities that are covered in the motion and beyond.

I want to make it clear that the Department of Education has been a key partner in the development of the NEETs strategy to date. At present, it actively contributes to the development of the interdepartmental strategy. It will continue to be a critical player in this and all other interdepartmental working on the needs of children and young people. The participation of the Department of Education should be clearly understood as implicitly covered by the amendment to the motion. Although I welcome the motion's suggestion of establishing a working group, I think that it would be premature to establish a separate group that, effectively, would deal with an area that is an integral part of existing and planned structures.

In conclusion, I have listened with interest to Members' views on what is an extremely important issue for us all. I particularly welcome the acknowledgement that the problems encountered by many young people, as they make the transition from school, cannot be solved by one Department alone. It is incumbent on us all, working with our service deliverers and stakeholders, to align all our services in the best possible way to support every young person on the journey from school or college to the world of work.

Mr Dickson: I welcome the debate and thank the Member who proposed the motion for accepting the Alliance Party's amendment.

I think that all Members will agree on the need to remove any barriers that prevent young people from accessing further education. The problem of those young people who are in not in education, employment or training — the so-called NEETs group — requires multiagency and cross-departmental co-operation. That has been clear and evident from the debate. It is not just an employment and learning issue, and the Department for Employment and Learning will have to work closely with the Department of Education. There must be no gaps in responsibility for our young people and their ability to gain the appropriate qualifications and move into the world of work. Indeed, there must be that necessary cross-cutting relationship between Departments to resolve the problem.

The NEETs group must be targeted, and I know that the Minister will launch a strategy to do that. It is estimated that every young person who is not in education, training or employment costs the economy some £160,000. If we can get them into further education, they will, even in these difficult and constrained economic times, have an easier time in getting employment. This issue must be prioritised, and I am glad that the Minister has made it such a priority. If we wait until young people have left school before addressing the barriers that they may face, we will not deal with the problem effectively. Indeed, every contributor to the debate has commented on that. It is a problem that must be addressed from early years through to further education level, and we all need to become involved in it. We need to ensure that there is early years intervention and prevention, and by investing as early as possible, we can reduce the amount of money that will have to be spent at the stage that the motion is attempting to address.

Accessing further education is vital if we are to improve the skills sets of our young people. If we are to grow the economy, ensuring that our workforce has the correct skills is paramount, and the skills strategy that the Minister referred to in his statement earlier today is vital. This is a cross-cutting issue that needs the co-operation of all Departments. I recognise that the motion should, perhaps, have included references to the Department of Education and the Executive but I believe that that is contained in the spirit of the motion.

I want to turn briefly to those Members who contributed to the debate. I, again, thank Mr Easton for accepting the amendment to the motion. In his contribution, he gave particular emphasis to early years provision and the need to address issues with numeracy and literacy. He also said that we need to equip young people with numeracy and literacy skills before they arrive at further education colleges, and other Members referred to the excellent work that all our further education colleges are doing to deal with some of the most basic educational requirements of our young people.

Mr Lyttle told us that some 45,000 young people are not in education or training and that we need a multiagency approach to tackle the problem.

Mr McCann had concerns about the exclusion of the Department of Education from the debate, but I assure him

that it is as much a part of the debate and is as necessary to resolving the problem as all the other Departments listed in the motion.

I turn to Mr Ramsey's comments. He said that the spirit of the motion included the Department of Education, but he recognised the need for DEL to lead on the matters in hand, particularly on the NEETs group of young people, and the frustration at the delivery of a NEETs strategy for Northern Ireland. I share that frustration. We need action, Minister, on those matters.

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

Mr Craig: The motion tabled by my colleague Mr Easton seeks to address the problem of educational assistance for those who are experiencing a vast array of social, health and economic barriers in Northern Ireland. Looking at the motion, I should commend the work of schools and further education colleges, because education has been made more widely available to those from lower-income families. The Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Education have sought to raise standards of achievement of young people in essential academic and vocational subjects.

At present, however, there are many issues surrounding access to further education. Although many steps have been taken by individual Departments, a joined-up approach in the form of a working group would further expand expertise and tackle the problem directly. There are many consequences for young people as a result of not being in education, employment or training, and the Assembly should want to eradicate the notion that those young people will become disengaged and uninterested by dealing with the matter collectively.

When the problem of access to further education is raised, it is often recognised that many young people who do not receive encouragement to progress through education suffer from low self-esteem and have few or no aspirations. That can often lead to involvement in criminal activity, which is why the motion also calls for the involvement of the PSNI.

Social background is a factor that many judge indicative of whether a young person is likely to succeed in further education and training. The allocation of £2.5 million by DEL to implement various initiatives to encourage participation has stimulated a demand for further education among disadvantaged and unrepresented social groups. Through the involvement of other Departments, such as the Department for Social Development and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, incentives can be identified that will further assist those who experience health or social difficulties to meet their full educational potential.

The Department of Education and DHSSPS are already working to improve GCSE and A-level attainment. DSD has also been involved in those developments. Schools and colleges are broadening their scope, and that is noticeable in the rate of take-up of higher education — Northern Ireland has one of the highest in the UK. However, greater cohesion and a joined-up approach are needed in order to address the issues of those young people who suffer from emotional and mental health problems, who have spent most of their childhood in social care, who need encouragement and support to attain their potential or who require financial

support through the education maintenance allowance and other initiatives.

3.45 pm

I listened with great interest to comments made from the Benches opposite. Although I do not disagree that the Department of Education might well have been included, the spirit and implication of the motion are that all Departments, including the Department of Education, need to get their head around the issue. As a House, we need to understand —

Mr F McCann: Raymond McCartney and Barry McElduff raised that issue. If you are saying that the Department of Education will play a full role, why not include it from the start? It has the resources and looks after a big section of the people who are being discussed.

Mr Craig: I have tried very hard to make it clear that I have no great difficulty with what the Member has said. The difficulty is that we cannot rewrite motions while they are being debated. If the Member felt so strongly, why did he not table an amendment, which would have been accepted? That said —

Ms S Ramsey: You are getting him into trouble now.

Mr Craig: Yes. I hope that the Member will accept the spirit of the motion.

There are some very serious issues, and I will give the House an example of what it means in reality. I make no apologies for my parochialism regarding the South Eastern Regional College, of which we in Lisburn are very proud. We live in a society that thinks that it has dealt with underlying poverty issues. There is an idea that there is no homelessness and no need for anyone to be on the streets, starving or begging. The local college gave me an example of an individual who, unfortunately, tried to take their own life. When the college investigated the young person's background, it was discovered that having been thrown out of home, the individual was living in a cardboard box. The person was 17 years of age. Here we are in Northern Ireland, and someone is living in a cardboard box and is socially excluded. We have a lot of work to do to meet the needs of such individuals, and I pay tribute to our local college, which, along with the Health Department, put in a lot of work and effort to sort out that individual's issues.

How will such people climb out of the poverty trap in our country? The only way is through education, and that is why it is essential that we get the strategy right. We must bring all Departments together, create a cohesive strategy to engage with those young people, bring them out of poverty through education and, through that, move Northern Ireland forward. We cannot all work in the shipyard. All the manual labour jobs are gone, and a lot of the skills required in the past are no longer required. They have all been replaced by skills sets that need higher education. Therefore, we need to provide more education for socially excluded children.

I listened with great interest to Barry McElduff, and, when I started talking about parochialism, I thought about the pot calling the kettle black. In true fashion, Barry went through a list of his local villages that have issues with rural broadband. We do not have to go up to Tyrone to find issues with local broadband. I remind the Minister, who is sitting here, that there are also issues in Annahilt, and I live only

10 miles outside Belfast. Broadband is an issue but it is not the main issue.

I thank the Minister for saying that his cross-departmental NEETs strategy, which is in draft form, will go to the Executive in April. That will be a huge step forward. I will not second-guess what will come out of that review and what will eventually be brought to this House, but the idea that we are moving the whole NEETs area forward is welcome, and I, for one, welcome the fact that the Minister is doing that. I also welcome the amendment that was brought by his party colleagues, and I hope that the entire House will support the motion and the amendment.

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

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the good work being done by further education colleges, as well as by schools; and calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to establish a working group as part of a wider delivery mechanism to support the forthcoming Executive strategy for young people not in employment, education or training, comprising officials from the Department for Social Development, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, all further education colleges and the PSNI, to identify ways of improving access to further education for young people experiencing a range of personal and social barriers.

Fairtrade Fortnight

Mr Deputy Speaker: The next item of business is a cross-party motion on Fairtrade Fortnight. The Minister of Finance and Personnel has notified the Speaker that he is unable to attend the debate today. The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment will respond to the debate on his behalf. The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and a further 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr McDevitt: I beg to move

That this Assembly acknowledges Fairtrade Fortnight; notes the adoption of Fairtrade procurement policies by many branches of local and central government; and calls on the Executive to review Fairtrade procurement policy with a view to supporting Fairtrade when and where possible.

At the outset, on behalf of the all-party group on international development, which is chaired by me and vice-chaired by Mr Jim Wells, I thank Mr Dickson, Ms McCann and Mr Swann for having added their names to the motion, thus making it a motion that enjoys the support of all the major parties in the House.

Fairtrade Fortnight is with us again, and it is a moment in the year during the period of Lent when we get to reflect on the opportunity that we all have as individuals, as consumers, as corporate consumers — public bodies that buy and procure services and goods — and as businesses that procure services and goods to play a constructive role, as global citizens, in the development of the lives of primary producers in parts of the world that are less developed than our own.

Fair trade is, indeed, about better prices, but it is also about decent working conditions, eliminating child labour, environmental sustainability and the serious business of producing commodities at the same time as respecting the world, heritage and environment in which they are being produced. It is about a better deal and fairer terms for farmers and workers in the developing world, and it enables some of the most disadvantaged farmers who are producing at the smallest conceivable scale of production to be able to successfully trade in global markets and, by doing so, alleviate their own poverty and create sustainability and cohesion in their communities so that we can reduce the grotesque, obscene inequalities that are still pervasive in our world today.

Last night in the Long Gallery, junior Minister Bell and junior Minister Anderson added their formal approval and support to Northern Ireland's efforts to continue to promote and live by the highest possible standards of ethical purchasing and principles of fair trade, and everyone in the all-party group acknowledges the contribution that the junior Ministers made to this debate last night. We look forward to them continuing to champion the Fairtrade and international development trade cause around the Executive table.

To put things in context, eight million people in 63 countries in the developing world benefit directly from fair trade in the developed world; they are the primary producers and their families. Eight million lives — more than the entire

population of this island — benefit directly. In truth, probably 100 million families benefit indirectly from our decision on this side of the world to place fair trade strategically on the agenda. Sales exceeded £1.7 billion in the UK last year, and €14 million in the South. It is big money, yet, when you break it down by household, we spend only about £1 per household per week on fair trade goods. If we think about it at the household level, there is so much opportunity for us to be even more ethical in our consumption.

I will address one issue that is often raised around fair trade: displacement. Are we not promoting the local sourcing of food? Do we not want to buy local? Of course we do, and good fair trade should never displace; it should complement. Good fair trade is about buying the stuff that must come from beyond these shores in a more ethical and fair way. It is not just about coffee and chocolate or cocoa; it is not just about bananas or other foodstuffs: it is about the cotton that we put in the bed linen in hospitals and that we use to clothe our surgeons and medical teams when they go to work in them. It can also be about sustainable materials, quarried products and consumables in the building industry. Those are all commodities that can be considered, traded and sourced ethically in a fair trade framework.

The great challenge for government in the years ahead is to begin to think about fair trade at that level. We have some excellent examples of fair trade champions in this region; quite a few of our local councils have full Fairtrade accreditation. Queen's University does, too, and the University of Ulster started the process of formal accreditation just this month. However, the Assembly has not, and neither have the Northern Ireland Executive as a whole. There is an immediate first opportunity, at a regional level, to demonstrate a commitment to fair trade by entering into the formal accreditation process that commits us to ensuring that we incorporate the principles of fair trade into our procurement policies.

There is a plethora of legislation and public policy frameworks that tell us how we can be more ethical in our procurement. Some of it, such as the 2003 public sector food procurement initiative that the Government in London introduced, is very helpful. Some of it, such as some EU directives, is less so.

The Civil Service in Northern Ireland is a fantastic thing; its members can be the best of people and the worst of people, all in one afternoon. When civil servants are expansive they will find us a way of doing something. However, when we feel that they are being a little less imaginative, out will pop something like the EU directive that governs procurement at a European Union level — the Official Journal procurement regulations. We will be pointed to the barriers that exist, and there are some. However, regions in other countries have found ways around those barriers.

Indeed, Peter Mandelson, a man whom we love to hate in this part of Ireland — that is probably an understatement — deserved some credit when he was European Commissioner for External Trade for having pioneered a lot of work in promoting ways in which public authorities across Europe can integrate fair trade criteria into public tenders and purchasing policies, and requiring the Commission to produce deeper and more robust guidelines around that issue.

That type of leadership has allowed a number of regions that are very close to us, most notably Wales and Scotland, to begin a process of actively promoting Fairtrade policy in procurement. An initiative called Help Make Wales a Fair Trade Country was a great success. It increased awareness from 44% to over 60% among the Welsh population over about three months and led to a significant uptake in the consumption of Fairtrade products. The Welsh Assembly has also grant-aided a full-time fair trade development position — a champion — in government to allow the opportunity for fair trade to be further explored.

It is fair to say that we would like today's debate to be the beginning of a process of doing two things: the incorporation of the Northern Ireland Executive and all the Departments as an accredited Fairtrade entity and a firm commitment from the Executive to be imaginative about using procurement policy to the best advantage to maximise the opportunity for Fairtrade and ethically sourced products to be incorporated not just into the consumables that government will buy but into other areas of government expenditure, like cotton, which are less obvious today when we think or talk about fair trade.

I am grateful to colleagues on the all-party group on international development for their support for the motion.

4.00 pm

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member who spoke previously and his colleagues on the all-party group on international development who tabled the motion. I put on record my praise for the work of that all-party group. This Building is awash with all-party groups — so many, in fact, that we need an all-party group to look after all the all-party groups. I am sure that they are very earnest in their work, but most certainly would not have the profile to bring the very useful and opportune business to the Chamber that the all-party group on international development has. Since that group's inception, which was not even in the previous term but during the experimental devolution in the early part of the century, it has been at the forefront of bringing forward issues that are of mutual and shared concern across all the major parties in the Assembly. I commend the members of the group for the work that they have done and the work that they do today. I encourage them to do likewise in the future.

I welcome the opportunity to have the debate. Sometimes, in this place, we are a little too insular for my liking. It is a bit of a by-product of the Troubles. Understandably, we looked in on ourselves and did not really care a terrible lot about the world around us. As a wealthier nation, however, we have a responsibility to look at the world around us and play a constructive role. Sometimes, it may not feel like it, but we are a wealthier nation, and we have a duty and responsibility to do much more for the world around us. This is a welcome opportunity to remind ourselves that billions of people around the world live in abject poverty day in, day out. Bad as it sometimes feels here and despite the many difficulties that we have had to come through and continue to contend with, we need to remind ourselves every so often that, in this country, we are exceptionally blessed and that many people around the world look at us and what we have with envy. We have a responsibility. The all-party group has highlighted in the past the fact that there is a real sense of willingness — there are exceptionally generous people

in this part of the world — to help charities that work in developing countries, particularly in Africa and Asia.

This is a good opportunity to raise the profile of the issue and educate people that there is an option for them. You give people a choice and you educate them about that choice. I like Fairtrade for precisely the reasons that Mr McDevitt outlined: it is about trade, not about handouts. Goodness only knows that, for many years, we looked at developing countries as places to just give things to and not to assist. We could help them to get out of the problems that they were in at that time, but we did not want them to develop in the way in which the rest of the world had developed. Fairtrade is a small way by which we can encourage them to develop their economies and to raise the standards that Mr McDevitt talked about. It is far from a charity, which we should avoid when dealing with such commodities.

As Mr McDevitt pointed out, as well as decent working conditions, Fairtrade deals with sustainability. Consumers are increasingly aware of that. There is a public consciousness about such things. Although times are difficult, people are starting to ask more questions about the working conditions of those producing these commodities and the sustainability of the products. That is something that public consciousness is catching on to.

The thrust of the motion is about procurement, particularly public procurement in Northern Ireland at Executive and departmental levels. One thing that I have learnt through the years, in whatever role that I have had, is that getting the flexibility that at times we would all like to see in procurement is not as easy as we would perhaps like. In many respects, we are severely limited. Mr McDevitt cited other countries, and there are always other countries that seem to do things much more flexibly than us. He cited Scotland, but a Scottish political party's manifesto that I looked at recently said that it wanted to look at and learn lessons from Northern Ireland's procurement policy. There are limitations, although it must be pointed out that guidance on fair trading, including Fairtrade options in procurement contracts, has been offered to Departments since as far back as 2006. That has produced contracts containing Fairtrade options being awarded recently. We are moving in the right direction. I appreciate that there is progress to be made, but an opportunity for that may be presented in a new EU procurement directive, which shows signs of allowing a little more —

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

Mr Hamilton: — flexibility. Therefore, there may be opportunities to do things much more positively than perhaps we have done so far, and that is what we would like. I again commend the motion to the House and praise those who tabled it.

Mr Swann: On behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, I fully support the motion tabled by the all-party group on international development. I acknowledge the Fairtrade movement's excellent achievements, such as Fairtrade Fortnight. I call on the Executive, as stated in the motion:

“to review Fairtrade procurement policy with a view to supporting Fairtrade when and where possible.”

As a society, we must pay due regard to the origins of the everyday items that we take for granted. In a globalised world, it is essential that developed countries such as Northern Ireland help producers in developing countries achieve a fair and decent standard of living. That is why I commend the Fairtrade movement and the work that it has undertaken in the past four decades to ensure that producers in developing countries get a fair deal.

Fairtrade is a trading partnership based on dialogue, transparency and respect. As Mr Hamilton said, it is not the charity that some people think it is. It seeks greater equality in international trading. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions and through securing the rights of marginalised producers and workers. Here, the ethos of Fairtrade is backed by major organisations, such as Oxfam and the British Association for Fair Trade Shops. Sales of certified Fairtrade products have continued to rise year after year, so great is respect for the movement. In 1998, certified Fairtrade coffee had total sales of £13.7 million. In 2011, that had risen to £194.3 million. Certified Fairtrade tea had sales of £86.7 million in 2011, and that is up from sales of £2 million in 1998. Those figures are testament to the hard work of supporters of Fairtrade, who daily help millions of producers in developing countries out of poverty and onto the road to sustainable and fair living conditions.

Fairtrade continues to grow on the world stage and particularly in Europe. Ulster Unionists are delighted to support Fairtrade in the Assembly and Europe. In the European Parliament, my party colleague Jim Nicholson MEP was pleased to support a unanimously adopted resolution on fair trade, which recognised the benefits achieved by the Fairtrade movement. That resolution is somewhat similar to the motion that we are debating.

I am proud to add that Northern Ireland has played its part in the fair trade movement. The UK Fairtrade Foundation awarded our capital city of Belfast Fairtrade City status in June 2005. To qualify for that title, a city or town must undertake initiatives that include the local council passing a resolution in support of fair trade and agreeing to serve Fairtrade coffee and tea at its meetings and in its offices, canteens and catering establishments. It was also highlighted that Dundonald and Antrim have Fairtrade Town status, and I hope that, in the future, Northern Ireland can increase the number of its towns with that recognition by working hard to ensure that fair trade is practised and promoted.

Mr Wells: I thank the Member for giving way. We are back to the old adage that the world ends at Glengormley. Outside the greater Belfast area, the Member should note that Warrenpoint, which is somewhere down south in Northern Ireland, is also a Fairtrade Town.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Ford: I thank the Member for giving way. As we are in correction mood, the Member should note that Antrim is a Fairtrade Borough, which encompasses the entire borough and not merely the town.

Mr Swann: I will not need the extra minute, because those interventions allow me to take out most of the next paragraph, in which I go on to expand on other areas of Northern Ireland that have Fairtrade status.

Anyway, another major achievement for fair trade in Northern Ireland was accomplished when Queen's University Belfast was awarded Fairtrade status in 2006. As the university is also a Belfast City Council flagship employer, it played a key role in the council's successful bid for Belfast to be declared a UK Fairtrade City. I welcome the moves, as highlighted earlier, by the University of Ulster to start down that road. As a result, Queen's University has a fair trade policy, a fair trade steering group and Fairtrade goods are available in all the university's food and beverage outlets. That could be reproduced in the Assembly.

I also want to use the debate to highlight the fact that, while there are many significant differences between producers in Third World countries and farmers in Northern Ireland, the Fairtrade Foundation has stated that many farmers in the UK face issues similar to those of farmers elsewhere, not least in struggling to ensure that they get a decent return for upholding social and environmental standards in their production. As Mr McDevitt said, our farmers should be there to complement as well as to produce and support. I accept that a fair trade system that operates for developing countries may not be as appropriate for our farmers, but we could look into the causes of the problems experienced by domestic producers, so that more robust and wide-reaching policy tools can be identified.

Considering its many significant achievements, I wish to once again commend the work of Fairtrade Fortnight and urge the Executive to use the opportunity to review fair trade procurement policy with a view to supporting Fairtrade when and where possible in order to help producers and suppliers get a fair deal for what they sell.

Mr McCarthy: On behalf of the Alliance Party, I very much welcome the opportunity to speak on this important issue, particularly as we are in the middle of the Fairtrade Fortnight. Indeed, much of what I wanted to say has already been said, so I will not detain you any longer than is necessary.

A Member: So is that it?

Mr McCarthy: Well, almost.

Events are taking place in this period to highlight the issue. I know that many organisations use a promotional week each year to gain publicity for their good cause. However, I encourage all people to buy Fairtrade products throughout the year, not just during this fortnight. I am very encouraged by the Assembly's catering staff, who put on offers and displays during this Fairtrade Fortnight. I know that they put Fairtrade products on sale all year round, so I say, "Very well done" to them. May they continue to do that.

We are seeing more and more businesses putting Fairtrade goods right at the heart of their businesses. That is because the public are becoming more responsible in buying goods. They want to know where the products come from and they wish the producers to receive a fair price for goods. By buying Fairtrade goods, we all help to pay farmers and producers in developing countries a sustainable price. That will enable them to look after their families and buy themselves out of poverty. We have a responsibility to help play our part in doing that.

As I understand it, the natural laws of the international free market dictate that farmers and producers have to sell at

the lowest price. That is often grossly unfair and results in some people earning less than \$1 a day for their family. We need to put sustainable development and social equity into the market and correct that problem.

A number of my colleagues have been advocates of fair trade in their local council. Judith Cochrane, when she was a Castlereagh councillor, proposed a motion for the Dundonald area to move towards Fairtrade status. Councillor Anne Wilson and our leader David Ford, when he was a councillor, lobbied for North Down and Antrim councils respectively to improve their Fairtrade status. I did so myself as a member of Ards Borough Council. I know that many politicians from all parties have done similar good work, and I pay tribute to them for all their efforts in such a valuable cause. I pay particular tribute to Mrs Carol Press, a very special lady living in Black Abbey, which is outside Greyabbey on the Ards peninsula, for her dedication to the cause of fair trade over the years. She was probably one of the first to mention Fairtrade. So, I pay tribute to Carol for all her work. I think she was in the Building last night to support the Fairtrade effort.

We need leadership from the Executive to encourage everyone, businesses and consumers, to buy Fairtrade, and I have no doubt that that will come. They cannot do just the bare minimum, the statutory requirement. We need them to do all that is possible to promote and purchase Fairtrade. I am grateful that both the junior Ministers were, I understand, in the Long Gallery with the Fairtrade people last night. If we all put extra effort into supporting Fairtrade, we will have played our part in making life much better for our brothers and sisters in the developing world. I fully support this cross-party motion.

4.15 pm

Mr Copeland: I, too, support the motion, and I want to highlight the excellent work undertaken by the Fairtrade movement in highlighting fair and ethical trading during Fairtrade Fortnight. The movement originated in Europe about 40 years ago and perhaps stands in stark contrast in many ways to what we were going through here 40 years ago. However, here we are, in the middle of Fairtrade Fortnight.

The issue began in the global south — Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean — and attempted to build direct, sustainable relationships with disadvantaged producers, providing fair access to markets in what they viewed as the developed north. With those aims, Fairtrade has developed and grown into a significant international movement — some would say business — symbolised by a high level of European co-operation, as my colleague Mr Swann mentioned. The issue of fair trade across Europe has become a major item on the political agenda of many countries, as ethical trading and sustainability of supply become even more important, particularly in countries that could be described as post-empire.

I am proud that we in the United Kingdom play our part as a world leader in the purchase of Fairtrade products. More than 4,500 products are licensed in the United Kingdom to carry the Fairtrade mark, and in 2011 purchases of Fairtrade products totalled £1.3 billion. That is a dramatic rise from the estimated £16.7 million of Fairtrade products purchased in 1998. That demonstrates the desire of the British public to buy ethically and to ensure that those producing the

goods get the fair deal that they are entitled to. Purchasing Fairtrade products means that more than 1.5 million people — pretty close to the population of Northern Ireland — farmers and workers across 60 developing countries, benefit from the international Fairtrade system.

In a local context, it is often the case that consumers will look for the most competitively priced product on shop shelves without regard to how it was made, where it came from or whether the producer was getting a fair deal. That has become even more true in these stringent economic times, when household budgets are squeezed and there is less money to spend at the tills. Despite that, I am pleased to hear today of Northern Ireland's continued support for the Fairtrade movement. With Belfast and other areas having achieved Fairtrade City status, it would be an excellent show of Northern Ireland's commitment to fair trade if the Executive were to follow in the steps of Belfast and other parts of the country and utilise their procurement procedures to focus at least in part on the purchase, where possible, of Fairtrade products. That would demonstrate the Executive's commitment to positively supporting the ethical sourcing and purchase of goods, products and services. The Ulster Unionist Party notes the Executive's commitment to bringing forward a strategy to promote fair and ethical trading that will sit within the framework for their sustainable development strategy. I urge them to bring that forward at the earliest possible opportunity.

We heard today of the untold benefits that Fairtrade has brought to the poorest producers around the world. As such, the Ulster Unionist Party fully supports the motion, acknowledging the fantastic work undertaken during Fairtrade Fortnight, and asks the Executive, respectfully, to review their procurement practices to support the purchase of Fairtrade products when and where possible.

Mr Eastwood: I congratulate the all-party group on international development and its work on bringing the Fairtrade issue to the attention of the public. That is the bottom line. Fairtrade has come a long way from its humble beginnings. People now make a conscious effort to buy Fairtrade products, and that needs leadership from this Government. We have already seen leadership from councils across the North. I will mention Derry City Council, which has led on the issue for a number of years. In our town, young people lead the way on the issue. Students from St Mary's College have been major supporters of the movement and have encouraged schools and young people to get on board and to spread the message. The movement is now very advanced in bringing proper fair trade to our society. It is important that not only local councils but all levels and arms of government commit to being truly fair trade. We can begin that process here.

It is important to remember where the Fairtrade movement came from and why. It came about because we have a very unequal world. We have economic structures that do not allow people living in the poorest regions truly to benefit from the value of their labour. That is the context in which this discussion needs to be set.

People say that there are movements around the world that are against globalisation. However, I remember reading an interview with a member of the Zapatista movement in Mexico, a peasant movement that were protesting against the North American Free Trade Agreement. He was asked,

“Are you anti-globalisation?”. He said, “No, we are very much in favour of globalisation. We just want a fair go at it as well”. That is the point.

In these difficult economic times, it is important to remember that there are places in the world that are much worse off than we are. In this part of the world, we do great work as Governments giving out aid to help such people. However, what people really want is a hand up and not a handout. Everything that the Fairtrade movement does will go a long way, as will everything that we can do as individuals and Governments to support it. In this difficult economic period, we need to remember that other people suffer a lot more. I commend those who tabled the motion.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Like other Members, I welcome the opportunity to speak to the motion, which our party supports.

A lot has been said about the Fairtrade movement and the way in which it highlights issues in developing countries and practical ways to help people who live there. Approximately 1.3 billion people live in absolute poverty in the world today. Living in Ireland, we can only imagine the life that those people endure daily. The worst thing is that, for those who are hungry and suffer from a lack of clean water, health facilities and education, it does not have to be that way. That is the biggest crime of all: there is enough food to feed everyone, and there is enough clean water for everyone to drink. It is not about handouts; it is about people looking to see how we can use the earth's resources for everybody. Everyone has an entitlement to that. When we talk about poverty, we tend to overlook the fact that it is man-made.

As other Members have said, Fairtrade uses this fortnight to highlight how people can be self-sustaining. We have already debated in the Assembly how we can use public procurement to challenge poverty. We talk about creating employment opportunities and regenerating communities in the North of Ireland, but the Executive could go a step further, through the social clauses that are put into public procurement contracts. There is no clear definition of what a social clause is, so we could take a very practical, proactive step and include Fairtrade in that definition. That would go a long way to help.

There are a lot of things that people can do. One of the main issues today is the debt that those developing countries are in. You could cancel that debt, and you could go further and offer no-interest loans to those developing countries. Those are the bigger steps that can be taken, but everybody needs to look at what small, practical steps can be taken. For example, when you buy coffee, you could buy Fairtrade coffee. One Member mentioned that some schools are already doing that. Those small steps can be taken when you buy those commodities to ensure that no one is exploited.

We need to look at what we can do in practical terms. The important thing is that we can change the quality of life for people. The Executive could take that practical step today and include Fairtrade in the definition of social clauses.

Mr Dallat: At the outset, I pay tribute to our former Assembly colleague Carmel Hanna, who kept the all-party group on international development alive during all the times of suspension. On a personal note, I am delighted to support the motion because it accurately reflects the people of Northern Ireland and their generosity towards other parts

of the world. The fact that it is an all-party motion adds enormously to the strength and commitment to making a difference to the people of Africa and other developing nations that depend on Fairtrade policies to sell their products in a market that is open-minded and unbiased. Arising out of the motion, I hope that there will be a drive to encourage more councils and other organisations to become involved in promoting fair trade and to go much further in assisting those who need support to develop self-help initiatives that will become self-sustaining, profitable and a step away from total dependency.

Some Members will know that I served on Coleraine Borough Council for 30 years, and, if I were asked for my most worthwhile achievement, I would say that it was to create a link between Coleraine and one of the most socially deprived areas in the world: Zomba in Malawi. Out of that, the wider community around Coleraine has risen to the challenge and contributed hundreds of thousands of pounds to self-help organisations in that part of Africa over the past 10 years.

4.30 pm

In Coleraine and, I am sure, other places, there is now a greater awareness of fair trade and how it can help people to sell their products in a market that is well disposed and favourable to them. I was cajoled into making my offices in Kilrea and Limavady Fairtrade offices. I suppose that that is one small way of saying that we support fair trade.

The linkage that I mentioned gives real support to people to become sustainable and to encourage them to become involved in the Fairtrade organisation. I know that it makes a difference. It is not a charity as we know a charity to traditionally be, but a partnership that brings enormous benefits. Not only does it bring enormous benefits to the people of Malawi and to those involved but it makes us think about the environment and being less wasteful, because Fairtrade products respect the environment. In reality, it makes us aware of the need to be fair trade-minded when we are doing our shopping.

Since 2001, my wife Anne has been a regular visitor to Malawi, not just to get away from me, of course, but to work with self-help groups, which comprise mostly women, but also farmers. They have had a particularly difficult time in Malawi this year because the crops have failed twice. She tells me that the greatest event in the calendar, apart from Christmas and Easter, is the Fairtrade conference, which happens annually. I have heard the most wonderful stories and seen many photographs of people dressed in their African traditional costumes making their way to the conference, where they get the support, the hope and the inspiration to become entrepreneurs in a world that is dominated by multinational corporations that are motivated by profit.

Fair trade encourages and promotes the co-operative principle, which changed the lives of people here in Ireland when our people were much worse off than they are today. Now, the same co-operative principles are changing life for the people of Africa. It is a good news story that is worthy of support and is central to fair trade.

Against a background of continuing poverty and disease, there is real hope, as people prepare for weeks for this wonderful event that focuses on the development of fair trade and how it can help people to help themselves. It

really does work. I would love to see every town and village declaring itself a Fairtrade zone, with notices posted on every approach road as a reminder to the public that when they buy goods — it is no longer only tea, coffee and bananas, but a whole range of products — they should consider Fairtrade, not only as a symbolic gesture towards those who are less well off —

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

Mr Dallat: — but as an investment in products of the highest quality. I was going on to mention Fairtrade wine, but you have called time on me. I thoroughly recommend it to anyone who enjoys a tipple.

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I would have been in favour of giving the Member an extra minute to allow him to announce that. However, as Members will know, I am here instead of my colleague Sammy Wilson, who apologises for not being able to be here today. He has asked me to represent him in the debate.

I welcome the debate. Fair trade is about fair terms of trade for farmers and workers and decent working conditions. Key to all of that, as many Members have mentioned, is sustainability in the developing world. I am delighted to join colleagues in supporting Fairtrade Fortnight, the ethos behind the event last night and the motion in the Assembly today.

As we have heard, Fairtrade Fortnight is celebrated annually throughout the world to highlight and raise awareness of fair trade and the concepts of international development. I was pleased that junior Ministers Bell and Anderson were able to attend the event last night. The comments that they made there were very well thought out, particularly the comments that drew on what happens here in Northern Ireland. We are very much a farming country. As junior Minister Bell said last night, he has always viewed the strength and independence of our farming sector as a source of pride for people in this part of the world, and it would be marvellous to see that sense of pride replicated across the developing world.

This year, as I understand it, the theme of Fairtrade Fortnight is Take a Step. That is aimed at encouraging everyone to make the change to a Fairtrade option. That might be something simple like swapping to Fairtrade tea or asking some of your local shops to stock more Fairtrade choices.

Back in March 2006, the procurement board, now chaired by Minister Wilson, published guidance on the procurement of Fairtrade products to assist public sector buyers in promoting the availability of Fairtrade options and contracts. That commitment, as Members will know, has been in place for some time now, and we should be proud of that.

The guidance defines fair trade and outlines the range of products recognised as Fairtrade products. It also provides advice and guidance on action that can be taken, in so far as EU procurement rules permit. I know that Mr McDevitt made reference to the fact that “out pops the EU directive” — I think that that was the phrase he used. We do, of course, have to have cognisance of the EU procurement rules. However, that does not mean that we should look at them in a negative way. We can look at how we satisfy them to deal with fair trade, which is, I think, the proactive way in which he would like EU procurement rules to be dealt with. The rules are there, but what most Members would

like to see is us trying to ensure that Fairtrade options are considered, where appropriate, in our procurement contracts.

Additional guidance was published in 2008 on the procurement of food and catering services. That was a collaborative effort drawing on the expertise of the Central Procurement Directive (CPD), the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and, indeed, the health and education centres of procurement expertise. That advice provides guidance to buyers on integrating sustainable development and healthy eating objectives into the procurement of food and catering services, including advice on providing Fairtrade options.

That is what has happened to date. What more can we do to support fair trade from the perspective of procurement? As I have indicated, the European Union rules on the issue limit the scope for the public sector to do more to procure Fairtrade goods. However, we want to be as proactive with those rules as we can, and I know that Minister Wilson has instructed his officials to be so. Scope is limited, because procurement rules demand that whatever is specified in a public sector contract is directly relevant to what is being purchased. The term "fair trade" is considered a social issue relating to the management of farms and the workers producing the products, but not actually to the product itself. So, whether a product is fair trade does not affect the end product in the same way as, for example, organic methods would.

Despite that, and despite not being able to specify Fairtrade products, there is clear scope to encourage the inclusion of what are known as fair trade options. However, buyers do need to take into account a number of factors to ensure that the procurement does not fall foul of the legislation. Buyers have to be aware that the inclusion of specific marks or trade names should be avoided. For example, it can be pointed out that where providers do offer fair trade options, the actual Fairtrade mark, or equivalent, is a helpful way of demonstrating that fair trade standards are being met.

The type of procurement contracts that offer the greatest opportunities to procure Fairtrade products are obviously those for catering services or supplies. For example, I know that CPD has awarded a number of contracts that promote the use of Fairtrade products, such as the NICS cleaning, catering and support contract, and the provision of cleaning, waste management, catering and security for the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise, as well as encouraging the use of Fairtrade tea and coffee for hospitality.

So far, I have addressed the central government arena. As Members know, local government falls outside the remit of Northern Ireland public procurement policy, and councils are not required to follow the procurement board policy. However, they are encouraged to do so on a voluntary basis, and I am encouraged by the involvement of councils in promoting Fairtrade and in running events. Of course, Belfast was one of the first areas to have that Fairtrade status. Belfast has recently had its dual status as a Fairtrade City renewed for a further two years until November 2013, and it is supporting a number of activities during the fortnight. I think that Bangor was the most recently accredited Fairtrade Town, and we were delighted to see that.

Members will be aware that the European Commission published proposals for a new procurement directive before

Christmas, and my colleague Minister Wilson made strong representation reflecting the policy emphasis and the nature of the economic environment in Northern Ireland. That includes softening the link to the subject matter of the contract, so that additional social and economic benefit can be taken into consideration in the award of such a contract. It is not clear as yet whether the proposals, once agreed, will open up the potential for further addressing fair trade and other social objectives within procurement. Of course, the proposals may change during the negotiation process, so unfortunately nothing is guaranteed.

I will touch briefly on some of the comments made by colleagues. In proposing the motion on behalf of the group, Mr McDevitt gave us the background to fair trade and indicated that it should be a supplement and not a substitute for local trade, and that is an important point. Of course, he referred to the European Union directive, which I have mentioned.

Mr Hamilton praised the all-party group, as did others, and talked about raising the economic well-being of developing countries. Of course, that is the key element because, as Mr Eastwood said, we want to give a hand up and not a handout in those cases. He talked about the impact that it had on working conditions and referred to the limited flexibility of procurement, as I would expect him to.

Mr McCarthy educated me today. He told me about Black Abbey. I knew about Greyabbey, but I did not know about Black Abbey.

Mr McCarthy: It is a townland.

Mrs Foster: I am delighted to hear about it today. He referred to a local lady who did a lot. One of the benefits of these motions is that it allows us to refer to local people who do a lot of good work, in this case in relation to fair trade.

Jennifer McCann referred to the need to widen social clauses. I am advised that sustainability requirements may be incorporated into the technical specifications of a public tender provided that the criteria are linked to the subject matter of the contract in question. Therefore, there is room to do more on public procurement. She went on to talk about cancelling the debt of African and other developing countries. I remind the House that we have a very extensive international aid package that goes out from Westminster, but, at present, we are paying £120 million a day in interest for our own debt in the United Kingdom, and we have to acknowledge that we ourselves have debt issues that need to be dealt with.

Mr Dallat said that he had been involved in the issue for quite some time and that he was personally delighted to be involved. I have talked about the theme of Fairtrade Fortnight and referred to Take a Step. He took a step by making his constituency offices Fairtrade offices, and other Members could look to that as well.

On behalf of the Minister of Finance and Personnel, I am content to continue to support and encourage Fairtrade options to be required within the context of European Union law and the efficient and effective use of public expenditure and, of course, as he would expect me to say, the delivery of best value for money for the taxpayer. Mr Deputy Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to respond to the debate.

Mr Wells: I thank everyone who took part in the debate and welcome the fact that we had support from all corners of the House. In his usual very articulate manner, Conall McDevitt outlined the importance of fair trade and painted the picture for many of us. He indicated that this was not just an issue about a fair price for products, but also looked at issues such as sustainability, environmental protection and the rights of workers. Therefore, fair trade goes well beyond what many of us may have understood before this debate.

4.45 pm

He also pointed out the gross inequalities in trade: the rich, affluent West has a very strong advantage over the small producer in sub-Saharan Africa and many other parts of the world. I was encouraged to hear that Fairtrade sustains eight million people in 63 countries and that sales are worth a large £1.17 billion per annum, but — this “but” is very clear — each week, we as a nation spend £1 on Fairtrade products in each household. Could one imagine the dramatic impact on poor, subsistence level farmers and producers throughout the world if that was increased to £10 a week?

Mr McDevitt also made a point that worries me intensely, which is that when people talk about Fairtrade products, they automatically think of tea and coffee. I am a bit of a health freak; I never take tea or coffee. I try to avoid them if I can.

Mr Dallat: What about wine?

Mr Wells: I certainly do not take wine — never, never.

It is important that people like me look at the wide range of other Fairtrade options. Indeed, I think that it was Mr Copeland who said that there were 4,000 separate products, so we have to remove the blinkered view that we are simply talking about a small and finite range of Fairtrade products.

The recurring theme was procurement and its importance. The Minister and many others were quick to highlight the problems that we face under European directives. It always strikes me as interesting that the most enthusiastic supporters of our membership of the European Union are the quickest to condemn the restrictions under which it places our Government when it comes to exercising flexibility in our trading relationships with others. However, that is a debate on a slightly political point.

Mr McDevitt also mentioned the role taken by the Welsh Assembly. The very least that we should do as a Province is to follow the example of another small devolved Government within the United Kingdom. I do not believe that we have gone that far.

Simon Hamilton praised the work of the all-party group and said that Northern Ireland could, at times, be too insular, which is very true. He mentioned the abject poverty of many primary producers in the rest of the world. He was absolutely right when he said that Fairtrade Fortnight and the whole aspect of fair trade is not simply a matter of giving additional money to farmers in poor countries. It also forces us to think as a nation about what we are doing to help those who are in a much less affluent position than us.

We have to be absolutely clear that the poorest person in Northern Ireland is fabulously wealthy in comparison with someone living in somewhere such as Mauritania, parts of India or Zambia. That is not to belittle those who have problems in our society, but we have to be realistic. I have seen for myself just how abject that poverty is in many

Third World countries. You could not possibly compare our situation with theirs.

Robin Swann made an interesting comment on how rapidly Fairtrade has grown in recent years. There has been a more than ten-fold increase since 1998. However, he then made a comment that I cannot agree with: he tried to compare the difficulties of farmers here, and there are real difficulties in the farming communities in Northern Ireland, with those of farmers in poorer countries. However, it must be remembered that those trying to eke out an existence in somewhere such as Zimbabwe or Mozambique do not have £230 million worth of European subsidies in the form of single-farm payments coming into their coffers. I support that, and I think that it is right, but it places farmers in western Europe at a huge advantage compared with those trying to produce goods in other countries. Therefore, we have to be very careful that we do not try to equate rural poverty in Northern Ireland with the abject poverty of people living on less than a dollar a day, as Ms McCann suggested. No one in rural or urban parts of Northern Ireland has to live on less than a dollar a day.

Kieran McCarthy, once again, got the opportunity to mention his patch, Ards, and the work of Carol Press from Black Abbey. I thought that he said “Blackadder”. I had heard of Greyabbey but never Black Abbey.

Mr McCarthy: There were friars at that spot.

Mr Wells: You learn something every day.

Mr McCarthy highlighted the need for a fair and sustainable price for goods and used a useful phrase about allowing people to buy themselves out of poverty.

Colum Eastwood also said that it is not a handout but a hand up, which is a very relevant phrase to use. Kieran mentioned the fact that so many people live on a dollar a day. He also indicated that quite a few towns in Northern Ireland have adopted Fairtrade status, including Dundonald, Antrim and Bangor in north Down; that is very welcome. To a large extent, local government has led the way on the issue.

Michael Copeland gave us an interesting update on how Fairtrade has evolved in the United Kingdom, having started 40 years ago. He wants the Executive to follow the example of our towns and cities, and he is absolutely right. Very unusually, it is our district councils that are leading the way on Fairtrade and giving encouragement to the Executive.

Colum Eastwood, who unfortunately could not remain, gave us the example of Londonderry city council's work on fair trade. We welcome the fact that, along with Belfast, our second city, Londonderry, has led the way on this important issue. I was very interested in his comment about the Mexican farmers who say that they favour globalisation, provided that they get a fair crack of the whip in international trade.

Jennifer McCann was the first Member to quote the dreadful statistic that 1.3 billion people live in abject poverty, the definition of which is living on less than \$1 a day. When you see the existence that people eke out, you see the importance of proper fair trade. She made a slightly controversial suggestion that fair trade should be included in a social clause in government procurement. Not everyone will agree with that. The spirit is fine, but not everyone can sign up to the concept of social clauses.

John Dallat quite rightly paid tribute to Carmel Hanna once again. I was a founding member of the all-party group on

international development way back in 1998 when the Assembly got up and running. There is absolutely no doubt that there were many occasions on which that group would have died on its feet had it not been for the persistence of Carmel Hanna; she just kept at it. It is a testimony to what she has achieved that we are still discussing these issues. When the Assembly was suspended for four or five years, had she not kept the group going, it would have collapsed and we would probably not be discussing the issue here today. Northern Ireland would be the poorer for that.

Mr Ford: I wish to join in the tribute that the Member and John Dallat have paid to Carmel. Will he also tell us about the work that he did on the Assembly Commission in the early days to ensure that this institution had Fairtrade policies?

Mr Wells: I had the privilege of serving on the Commission in the early days of the Assembly. I got all-party support from the five parties that were represented on the Commission to start the ball rolling as far as Fairtrade policy in this Building is concerned. If we, as an Assembly, do not take a lead in some small way, we cannot lecture the Executive, district councils or public bodies. In some small way, the Commission took a lead on the matter at a time when it was not a particularly attractive proposition. We pay tribute to Carmel Hanna once again, and we are glad that she is still campaigning, albeit in a different role and no longer as an MLA.

We have all listened with interest about the fascinating work that Coleraine Borough Council is doing in Zomba in Malawi; Coleraine has led the way in that twinning arrangement. There is a tendency in Northern Ireland to twin with somewhere in Bermuda, Barbados or the Bahamas. There is not the same stampede to twin with a very poor part of the world such as Malawi, so I pay tribute to Coleraine for leading the way on that important issue.

John Dallat emphasised the fact that it is not only about sustainability but that there is an emphasis on the protection of the environment. I had the privilege of attending a seminar in the Long Gallery last night at which a farmer from El Salvador gave a first-hand account of the importance of Fairtrade to his community.

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

Mr Wells: One hundred and twenty-five families there are sustained almost entirely through Fairtrade, and that has to be commended.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly acknowledges Fairtrade Fortnight; notes the adoption of Fairtrade procurement policies by many branches of local and central government; and calls on the Executive to review Fairtrade procurement policy with a view to supporting Fairtrade when and where possible.

Motion made:

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

Adjournment

Parkgate Quarry, County Antrim

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes to speak, and the Minister will have 10 minutes to respond. All other Members who are called to speak will have seven minutes.

Mr Kinahan: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thought that I had only 10 minutes. I am very grateful for the chance to talk about Parkgate quarry today, but I am sad that it is necessary to do so. I am also grateful to the Minister for taking the time to be here, particularly when we have met him at other times. However, I want to raise new issues and concerns, and I am keen to know where the application has gone. I am grateful that the Minister withdrew the application, or got it withdrawn, from Antrim Borough Council, and I look forward to hearing about what he feels is the next stage. Yet I hope that a next stage does not exist and that this is the end of it.

I need to declare an interest, as I live 1.5 miles away and next to the haulage route listed in one of the conditions. I also need to declare an interest as Danny Kennedy's Assembly private secretary, which means that I cannot raise the issue of roads directly. I will leave that to other Members, if they feel that that is necessary. I would like to concentrate on other matters today, including enforcement.

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

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, this is not a case of Nimbyism. There are very real reasons for securing today's debate. Under normal circumstances, the planning application would not have been approved once all the points, especially all the negative ones, had been taken together. I feel that that point needs to be raised strongly today. We are not against recycling or either of the planned uses for the quarry, and if a different route were available, be it across fields or along other roads, that might have been a better way. However, we do not want it to go ahead at all.

I am grateful to the Minister for visiting Parkgate during the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) conference. I got a text saying:

"We have seen Mr Attwood on the Connor Road".

So I am grateful to him for looking at the site and taking the issue on board. Parkgate is a rural country village. It has one street or, arguably, two streets with a T-junction. It has four housing estates full of families, a primary school, a pub, shops, a chippy, a bridal shop and one or two other shops. It is very much a family village. According to the latest electoral register, its population is 2,251, of which, I assume, about 1,500 live in the village. It is a typical rural village, with children, dogs, bicyclists, riders and a farming community. It has parking problems, with traffic moving in, out and around to get to the shops. It is a through point for

traffic running from Kells and Ballymena to the M2 and from Ballyclare and Doagh to Antrim. It is a very, very busy little town when it comes to traffic.

Throughout all this, the feeling in Parkgate and the surrounding area has been that a big company was pushing the plans. It is not quite bullying, but it does feel like heavy-handedness. Henry Brothers has not once come to speak to the people of Parkgate, despite my offers on two occasions. I was hopeful that its representatives would come to see, listen and understand the problem. Sadly, that has not happened, but it might happen yet. I do not think that those people would put the same number of lorries through their village.

A letter dated 4 July from Scottish lawyers Maclay, Murray and Spens to Joanne Doherty of the Planning Service seemed particularly heavy-handed and almost threatening. One comment indicated that the firm was annoyed that MLAs had taken up the local interest. Yet that is our job, and we must put that across. If you read it another way, it looked as though the firm was threatening the Planning Service and telling it how to do its job.

5.00 pm

One big question that, we feel, has not been properly answered is whether the quarry is still in use. When I was a small child, I could hear it being quarried. I am now 54 years old. I remember the last blasting in that quarry 40 years ago. To most of us, it has remained dormant since then. Licences for smaller uses, not necessarily quarrying, have been applied for two or three times. We believe that the quarry is unused. We believe that it is very likely to have been listed as a disused quarry in the review of old mineral permissions (ROMPs). However, when we asked for that list, we were told that it was not available to the public. Immediately, we all felt that something was being hidden. We want to know whether Parkgate quarry is on that list. We also want to know whether the list existed when planning applications were made and whether it was then shelved and for what reasons. In the meantime, over the past 40 years, Parkgate has gone from having probably 250 to 2,250 inhabitants — perhaps, many more. More cars go through the village. They are faster. There are bigger lorries. There are many more children and horses. Yet, we are still dealing with a planning application from that time that allows the quarry to be used as such.

I also want to mention the strange use of negative conditions that seems to have come up. As I have said, if you look at all the issues cumulatively, you really should say no to the entire planning application. You could liken it to a tree preservation order for a wood that protects all trees initially. A developer could go in and ask, "Which trees?". Eventually, he narrows it down to the important trees and looks at those that he feels are ill and should be taken down because they are dangerous. You would end up with very few trees, and the developer would be allowed to build. That is how, we feel, those negative conditions are being placed. There is a series of conditions. They can knock them down one by one until, eventually, two or three owners are left with all the pressure on them to sell and let the development happen. That is plain wrong. I wonder whether negative conditions of that type are a normal way forward — I have not seen that before — or whether a worrying precedent is now being set.

I want to raise strongly the hydrological matter. Stories about the quarry are that it leaked and that is why its use was stopped. We have been told of one case when dye was put into the quarry and it came out in various other locations. There are 13, 14 or 15 farms that get water from the quarry. The legal letter that I mentioned indicates that there are no concerns because there is no toxic waste. Yet, we need to ensure that enforcement exists so that there is never toxic waste from building materials. That is a dangerous assumption to put in place. Therefore, we ask the Minister to ensure that an independent hydrological study is put in place with conditions before anything commences, so that we know that it is safe before it starts. At our meeting with the Minister, he certainly said that he would get one organised. However, he seemed to say that it would happen afterwards. Therefore, when it comes to enforcement, which is our greatest concern with all the negative conditions, I asked the Minister to put in place a quick enforcement system, with the right penalties if necessary, that will allow people in the neighbourhood to report breaches, have them dealt with as quickly as possible and, if necessary, stop the quarry operating until those matters have been dealt with, if, indeed, that development has to go ahead.

The same legal letter implies that Henry Brothers already has all the necessary owner's rights. However, we are led to believe that two of the four passing bays do not have the right sight lines and are owned by third parties. That is why we need to have enforcement in place. We are also told that the sight lines for the two or three accesses to the quarry are also not owned by Henry Brothers. That is what I meant when I said that unnecessary pressure would be put on those owners, as each skittle or tree is knocked down from the negative conditions.

I also ask the Minister to attach further planning conditions to protect the town during rush hour and drop-off times. Those are the times when the town is at its busiest, and adding 10 or 20 lorries to the traffic will only make it much worse and more dangerous. On the roads issue, the layout of the junction seems sensible, but I would like to know whether it works before commencement is allowed.

The debate on noise levels is still to be concluded. There is much good mitigating advice on what is to be done, yet it seems that two different measurements are being followed. The residents in and around Parkgate want to know for sure that, if it is noisy, they will be able to deal with it and that the right enforcement proceedings are in place. From one or two things that happened in connection with the Nutts Corner racetracks during my time in Antrim Borough Council, I know that the present system is phenomenally slow.

Minister, you have heard that I am against the application in its current form. I and all the residents are particularly uncomfortable with the mass of negative conditions. We need to have good, slick enforcement in place. I hope that, as they go through their speeches, all my colleagues from South Antrim will add much more detail on many of these matters. Please, let us see Parkgate surviving as the good little town that it is and not being wrecked. I know that it was a decision by a previous Assembly that has left us where we are, but I am here, and I want to see Parkgate protected.

Mr T Clarke: I thank the honourable Member for South Antrim for securing the Adjournment debate. The last thing that he said was that this is the result of a decision made

by a previous Assembly. To the best of my knowledge, the intention to make this decision is recent and will be taken by the current Minister in the current Assembly.

Although I look across the Chamber at the Minister of the Environment, who is responsible for the Planning Service, much of what I want to focus on is on roads, which is in the portfolio of another Minister. There are many roads issues that to me, as a layperson, do not seem to have been addressed, and the residents of the Parkgate area have the same concerns. Roads Service is a consultee of the Planning Service, and it is interesting that it does not seem to have raised any objections to this application. That contrasts with the view of one official, who, I am led to believe, was of the opinion during the past 12 months that the application should be turned down from a roads point of view. There seems to have been a Damascene conversion in the minds of Roads Service officials, who came to a different opinion. I would like to know what brought about that change of mind, and it would have been useful to hear the views of the Minister for Regional Development, rather than the Minister responsible for the Planning Service.

My colleague from South Antrim referred to the environmental issues in relation to the quarry. That is an area that we are all concerned about, regardless of whether the application is for Parkgate or anywhere else. The quarry will have environmental impacts, and we in the farming community are also concerned about those. Danny touched on those concerns when he addressed the issues of water pollution and suchlike.

My next point goes back to the roads issue. I was struck by the pictures supplied by residents that showed what it would look like with large lorries using a road that does not have adequate passing bays. It has been suggested that more passing bays will be provided, but there is a question mark over the ownership of the land and whether Roads Service has the right to allow those passing bays. Therefore, we are looking at using third-party lands to provide that instrument to facilitate the quarry.

Danny said that much of this was in the previous term. I disagree: it was obviously a current application until it was pulled last week or the week before because other issues had come to light. The Minister of Justice — I suppose that I should call him Mr Ford today — raised the matter and pulled it from a council application two weeks ago, for which we should thank him, because it has kept the debate alive.

Mr Swann: I thank the Member for giving way. In regard to the legal documents that were referred to earlier, it was actually pointed out that assurances were given to the clients at the Stormont meeting in February by both the then Minister Mr Poots and John Cummins on behalf of the Planning Service that, provided they met the reasonable requirements of the statutory consultees, the applications would be determined at the earliest possible opportunity. Surely for that to progress by then, Roads Service and the previous Minister must have signed off on it?

Mr T Clarke: That is very interesting. Along with my colleague Paul Girvan and the MP for the area, Rev McCrea, I met the current roads Minister to raise some of our concerns about this. If something has been signed off, it is hard to comprehend why, if a Minister is still in place

and these concerns have been raised, they could not be addressed by the Minister who holds the portfolio at the time.

I listened today to what Danny Kinahan said in relation to junction improvements and how they would work. Even though he is the Minister's Assembly Private Secretary, it seems that he is somewhat concerned about whether those junction improvements will work. It is putting doubt in the Minister's Department at the moment. Enough concerns have been raised for the Minister to look further into that issue. Many issues were raised on that day when we met some months ago — certainly it was late last year when we met the Minister who is currently responsible for Roads Service. My colleague Mr Girvan will probably be of the same mind: many of the issues that were raised on that day were never addressed, right down to the thought of having passing bays. There are corners on that road that are entirely blind, and with eight-wheeler lorries going round corners on the wrong side of the road meeting oncoming traffic, it is difficult to comprehend how that can be justified and how the rest of the motorists and the people who live in the area can be convinced that that can happen in a safe manner.

That does not take away, however, from the concept of using the quarries for another purpose. As I have said, it does not matter which area a quarry is in; most people have concerns about their use. It is an argument not about the previous use of the quarry but about what it is intended to be used for in the future. That is what has raised most concern. People have a general expectation that, if a quarry has been there for many years — Danny is a bit older than me; he said he is 54, and I am only coming 45 — it will come to the end of its useful life at some stage. Most of the people in Parkgate welcomed the fact that that time had come but are now disappointed that an application is in.

Danny referred to the building firm in his opening remarks. I suppose that the flip side of that is that we have to accommodate that firm so that it can carry on its recycling business. It is about getting the balance right so that we do not create environmental problems and road problems and about getting the right location so that that business can go on. That business is creating employment in a difficult time, and that is important. It is about getting a balance between that and the effect on people's lives.

As Danny said, Parkgate is a small but growing village, but to put that amount of traffic through it will put added pressure on the people who live there. I welcome the purpose of this debate. It is just disappointing that it is only an Adjournment topic, which does not mean all that much other than we get an opportunity to have a conversation about it. As I said, the conversation has been going on for some time, but neither Roads Service nor the Planning Service has changed its mind.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh míle maith agat. I thank my colleague Danny Kinahan for securing the debate. I, too, welcome the attendance of the Minister of the Environment and the interest that he has demonstrated in this case.

With any planning application, there are issues that have to be considered. Clearly, an underpinning economic and environmental rationale has been applied to the business case in order to support it. Whether you support or oppose the proposition, you have to recognise that the arguments for it have to be balanced against the counterarguments

on the impacts that it would have. We clearly have a demonstration that this is a controversial proposition that directly affects the local community. The opposition is not contrived but is very sincere, and they raise genuine issues. They appear to be dealing with a big business interest that is impervious to the arguments because there has been no engagement and no response to the issues. It could be that some of the issues or some of the fears that are being articulated by local residents and local representatives could have been addressed, but it seems that, in prosecuting the application, there is no real engagement or concern about the issues that were being brought forward.

5.15 pm

My remarks are directed to the Minister, because I know that he reflects carefully on these issues. He has some background and experience in law, and he knows that there is a real possibility that the application could be judicially reviewed. Therefore, he has to proceed with careful attention to detail, but I argue strenuously that there are significant local concerns. This has been in process since 2005, but, even at this advanced stage, there is ample opportunity to pay attention to the detail and attempt to alleviate the concerns. It is incumbent on the Assembly, not only the representatives for South Antrim, to indicate that we will take cognisance of local concerns, particularly when they are grounded in factual reality.

People know what the roads system is like and the consequences of bringing in heavy traffic. We are talking about 2,000 tons a week, so this is massive. There is also a return journey for processed waste back to Belfast. The impact on a small rural community can only be imagined, and that is only one aspect of it. There have been concerns about the effect on groundwater, but, for some reason that is incomprehensible to me, no one has addressed that formally or scientifically or attempted to persuade those who had to be persuaded that there would be no detriment. The local farming community in particular has drawn attention to that repeatedly.

If the issues remain unresolved, it is difficult to see a Minister setting them aside also. There is an onus, which I believe the Minister will address, to protect the local community or to ensure that a process is put in place, whether that is by public examination, to establish whether the concerns can be addressed or resolved or whether the application should fail because the concerns cannot be addressed and because the impact on the local community would be greater than the benefit of opening one more site. I have a schedule of all the waste treatment plants in that general area, the circle around greater Belfast. At one level, it is quite impressive, and, at another level, it is depressing because it speaks to the volume of waste that we produce. If the application is dealt with on the basis of the arguments, in my view there can only be one conclusion, which is that it should be turned down or referred for public inquiry.

Mr Ford: I congratulate my colleague Danny Kinahan on securing the debate, and I declare an interest as a member of the church committee of Second Donegore Presbyterian Church, which abuts the site. In that context, I correct Danny slightly. He said that the quarry had not been worked for 40 years. I can confirm that there was at least one blast in the face of the quarry on a day in June 1975, because it happened during my wedding ceremony. At that point, all

the Fords jumped up because, whatever part of the country they came from, they were unaware that there was a working quarry down the road. All my in-laws said, "Oh there they go again". However, it was certainly very shortly after that in the early 1980s that the quarry ceased to be used, and it has been effectively abandoned since then. I believe that, under the ROMP legislation, it should be regarded as abandoned. Indeed, its most recent use was as a film set, which I suspect is not particularly good as a precedent for a waste transfer station.

Following on from the points that Mitchel McLaughlin made, it seems to me that there is a fundamental question whether Parkgate quarry is the right place for what is proposed. The concept of carting several hundred tons or, perhaps, a couple of thousand tons a week 20 miles out of Belfast — it will overwhelmingly come from Belfast — for processing to then transport 80% of it back to Belfast either for reuse or, potentially, for shipping to the Far East in many cases, does not seem to me, particularly given the narrowness of the Connor Road, the access to the quarry and the steepness of the hill as it goes down into the village, to be a particularly good example of a best practice environmental option. However, the Minister has to deal with the application that is there, and it seems to me, I regret to say, that we have an illustration of how the Planning Service has failed to handle this application well. In Antrim borough and in the Ballymena planning division, we have, over the years, seen a very good and very professional service, but it seems to me that this issue, which is a much more significant application than many that go through the local office, has been treated in a considerably less professional way.

I spent two lengthy sessions in Millennium House going through the files, and the level of detail that appears on those files and the quality of the plans and maps is far worse than one normally sees in County Hall in Ballymena for far smaller applications. Indeed, they are far worse than you would expect to see for a single dwelling in the countryside. Plans are in poor detail and are, in many cases, on an inadequate scale to show whether the issues that have concerned local people, particularly about roads, have been addressed. Passing bays are shown that either the applicant or Roads Service claim control over. Sight lines for the two accesses are not shown adequately. Indeed, one of the accesses is shown on the plans with the sight line going outside the blue line of the applicant's ownership. On the other one, the access sight lines are not shown at all, and there is inadequate scale to determine whether they infringe on third-party land. It is my belief that they do. I understand that, at a meeting that roads engineers had with one of the local landowners last week, they acknowledged that a passing bay that would be required will intrude onto third-party land. However, the plans are accepted at the moment, as all land is either under the control of the applicants or of Roads Service. The fact that Roads Service somehow managed to approve an apparent passing bay on one of the steepest parts of the road almost beside a blind bend on which there was a fatality just a couple of years ago as a place that it expects the driver of a 20-ton lorry to pull into to stop while going up a steep hill seems to be a long way short of a realistic way of treating the needs of that area.

In the context of having declared my membership of the church committee, I will say that there is a blue line on the plans that claims ownership and control of an area of land that has been leased to Second Donegore Church for 999

years as a car park. That happened within the past 30 years or so. I suspect that none of the current applicants will be alive when they regain control of that land, and I do not see how anybody can claim control of land that they have leased for 999 years when that land is required for one of the sound bunds that has been applied for.

Similarly, the issue of water has been raised. It is my understanding, having been involved in the issue about 25 years ago, that a similar application failed to make progress because it was impossible to carry out the necessary hydrological survey to show that there was not a potential problem with water quality. However, there is very little on file to suggest that that water quality issue, which affects a number of neighbouring farms, has been addressed at this stage.

The sound issue has been addressed in a way that acknowledges that sound limits would be exceeded at two properties, and, in one case, the sound level was taken at Dunamuggy Primary School, which has been closed for some years. It sits behind Second Donegore Church at a slightly lower level further away from the quarry, and, therefore, one must assume that the church will have a worse defect than the school, yet that has been accepted by the Planning Service as a valid area, even though the sound level at the old school building is inappropriate.

So we have what is effectively an abandoned quarry — it would, I believe, be treated as such in any reasonable way — being regarded as if it is of working quality, given the suggestions being made that it could continue as a working quarry without any different planning permission. We have issues of roads access not being addressed properly and major issues about land ownership in relation to the roads requirements. We have issues of water quality not being addressed, further issues of the potential for traffic congestion around a very narrow and awkward corner in a growing village and serious issues about the potential threat to the viability of the main shop and the other takeaway food shops in the area, where there would be the biggest congestion. All of that, as Danny Kinahan said in his opening remarks, is to be covered by negative conditions.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Ford: I am grateful to the Minister for his intervention on two occasions to have this withdrawn from Antrim Borough Council. We will need to hear more from him.

Ms Lewis: I thank the Member for securing this debate. The debate highlights a very important issue for the residents of Parkgate, which is situated in my constituency. Parkgate is a small village, as has already been stated, situated just outside Templepatrick, a short distance off the main road to Belfast International Airport. Despite an understanding that the plans relating to the quarry were being shelved after over 400 objections were received in response to the consultation, residents, as well as local councillors, were shocked to see the application up for approval. Subsequently, it has been deferred at the request of the Minister, who is present in the House. Although one has to take into consideration the planning policies in relation to that application, the volume of objections received demonstrates local feelings towards the plan. Despite that, the Planning Service, through its willingness to approve the application, is ignoring the views of the residents who oppose the application.

Granting approval to the application will result in an increase in noise levels, not only from the increased volume of traffic because of lorries transporting earth from the quarry through the small village but from machinery present on the site itself. That would be unacceptable and would disturb the lives of those living in the village and damage their quality of life. I also have concerns, which are shared by the community, for the safety of people living on or beside Connor Road, which is the main route to and from the quarry. Lorries would be required to travel through Parkgate's main street and would pose a major risk to road users, whether they are car users or pedestrians.

The applicant has proposed the construction of passing bays at certain parts of the road in order to control the flow of traffic and ensure safety. However, a family car is no match for these lorries, especially as the road is a country road. Therefore, I have significant road safety concerns for the residents, particularly the children living in the area. Some residents' property will also be directly affected in order to facilitate the approval of the application, which is not acceptable in my opinion. I am also concerned about the levels of dust that would be created in the area as a result of the planning application and the increased traffic. That could present hazardous conditions for residents, especially new residents who have moved into the area in recent years.

The application poses a number of pertinent questions. What has the Planning Service done to address the concerns raised throughout the consultation? The residents of Parkgate deserve a say on the application, and I am concerned that the Planning Service, through the time delay between the two applications related to the proposal, is refusing those newly established residents their say. Since the initial application, the number of residents of Parkgate has grown, and those changes must be taken into consideration. Therefore, I urge the Minister to look carefully at the application and give consideration to the people of Parkgate.

Mr Girvan: I thank Danny for securing this evening's debate. It is important that we highlight a few of the issues. We are dealing with what is a very idyllic part of the countryside. The history goes back quite some time in relation to the application, as Mr Ford mentioned. As far back as 25 years ago there were issues associated with the site.

I wish to go back only to 2005, when it came on the scene. The local community raised extreme opposition to that application. Some of the concerns that they had were about the road, the disruption to the village and the additional traffic through it, and the watercourse in the area. I do not know whether the Department has had an investigation into this, but a number of the farms and homes in the area have taken advantage of the opportunity to sink their own boreholes. They, therefore, accept their water from spring wells and suchlike. They do not rely on mains water. A number of people in the area have made that choice. They have a right to make that choice, and we do not have the right to pollute their water.

5.30 pm

At the time of the previous application, it was stated that Connor Road was unsafe for vehicles of the size that would use it and that, as a condition, it would have to be widened. We are talking about passing bays now. At that time, they were talking about widening the road along its entire length.

Mr T Clarke: Does the Member accept that if there was a suggestion in 2005 to widen the road, it should not be done at the expense of the public purse? Surely it would have been a condition that the contractor providing the land should bring that road up to standard rather than the matter being left for the public purse to pick up at a later date. If that was considered then, has it taken so long because they were unable to do that at that time?

Mr Girvan: I very much take on board the comments of my colleague, but in doing so, I will say that I am not exactly sure why that did not happen. I reckon that it is because negotiations could not be dealt with in relation to getting the ownership to allow it to happen. Therefore, the land could not be vested because it was not an issue. It was only to facilitate a private development. The infrastructure argument was not being made on the basis that the Department could have taken it.

In light of the point that has been made, the fact is that, at that stage, Roads Service stated that the road had to be widened to accommodate the vehicular movements. The number of vehicular movements on the present application is for 20 vehicles per hour. I do not know whether everybody in the Chamber has been to Parkgate village, but I can tell you that that means 20 vehicles per hour going to and from a site. The village corner is not the easiest to manoeuvre around either. There is a difficulty: some of the vehicles will have to go over the central line to make it into that road. That is another issue.

As the Department of the Environment and the Planning Service are the bodies that will rubber-stamp the decision, they very much have to take on board and address all these issues. From looking at some of the consultation responses, I am not so sure that they have all been addressed. Some of the issues that we are raising today are valid. Relying on negative conditions in a planning application is a very weak stick to lean on. It is like relying on a broken stick. Once you have allowed a certain thing to happen and expect enforcement to deal with it, you are somewhat closing the door after the horse has bolted. That is a difficulty. I do not believe that we should be looking at that. All the negative conditions do not mean that the thing cannot go ahead.

Other points have been made about noise. The measurements that were put forward and the testing points in relation to the decibels that were migrating from the site to adjacent properties were excessively — not marginally — in excess of the agreed limits. We heard that some conditions would be put in place, such as closing doors in the areas in which machinery is being operated to manage the waste product and break it down.

Having worked in certain parts of industry, I can say that when working in a dusty, noisy environment, sometimes the easiest thing to do is open the doors and let it out. Not doing so may be a planning approval condition, but it can be one that is somewhat difficult to enforce.

There is also an issue in relation to some of the wildlife — animals and birds — in the area. We all know that quarries can be and are used by nesting birds, such as kestrels and others. That issue has not been properly addressed through the process. However, as far as I am concerned, Roads Service and the Planning Service are involved in what goes forward. I appreciate that the application was pulled from the

schedule to allow us to come forward but I ask that this be looked at in detail to ensure that concerns are addressed.

The fact is that the application includes a red line around areas that are not owned by the applicant. Nor is there an agreement with landowners to include such land. If that were the case, and that is one of the points —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Girvan: Yes. That is one of the points that I wanted to highlight. When applications are put in, it is important that we ensure that the applicant owns or has a signed agreement for the use of red-lined areas.

Mr Wells: Members will look at me and ask why a Member for South Down is contributing to a debate about a quarry in South Antrim. I am very aware that I am treading on eggshells by taking part in the debate. I have no doubt that Mr Kinahan, on the Bench to my right, is looking quite shocked and surprised. I must declare why I am taking part in the debate. I am the chairman of the Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group, the main purpose of which is the study and protection of rare birds of prey in Northern Ireland. As a result, I am a regular visitor to Parkgate quarry. Indeed, I remember that during one of my early visits — probably during the referendum period on the Belfast Agreement — there was a rather uncomplimentary poster about the honourable Member for South Antrim Mr Ford on a lamp post outside the quarry. I am glad to say that I think he is a lot more popular in Parkgate now than he clearly was then because, had my face been on that poster, I would have been almost suicidal.

I go to that quarry because Professor David Bellamy, who is one of the world's leading authorities on botany and zoology, caused a great deal of controversy a few years ago when he said that there should be more, not fewer, quarries in the United Kingdom. Why would he have made that extraordinary comment? Quite simply, the fact is that abandoned quarries become wildlife refuges, often in the middle of a green desert, and none more so than Parkgate quarry.

I cannot comment on the roads or the views of residents, but I can say that I am a wee bit concerned that the nature conservation value of Parkgate quarry has been overlooked in all the arguments. It has been used by nesting peregrine falcons on at least three occasions. Pairs of peregrines regularly hang around the quarry and attempt to nest, so it is important for a schedule 1 species. The quarry is a regular nesting site for kestrel, which is most definitely schedule 1 and, therefore, specially protected, and it is used annually by species such as raven, grey wagtail and sand martin. In the greater south Antrim countryside, those species are under enormous pressure. Yet, we seem to be giving permission for something that will remove all that wildlife interest.

Unfortunately, the fate of quarries in South Antrim — all of which I have been in many times — is to be worried about. Tardree, or Ladyhill as it is known, has been passed to become a waste disposal site. If it develops like that, the wildlife interest will eventually disappear. What happened at Ballyclare quarry was an absolute tragedy. The most wonderful wildlife site that I have ever encountered in South Antrim was totally obliterated when planning permission was given for a housing development. I was very much involved in that planning application. Massive assurances and

negative conditions that were attached to protect the wildlife were completely ignored by the developer, and the area was destroyed as a wildlife spectacle. Therefore, the emphasis should not be only on the community.

I know the road at Parkgate well, and it is totally unsuitable for large lorries, but by giving permission for the development we will lose yet another little jewel in our countryside: an area where we can take our children to show them newts and all sorts of interesting rare fauna and flora will be gone. There must be more suitable industrial sites for this kind of undertaking elsewhere in greater Belfast.

From an environmental point of view — I speak as one who, beyond the wildlife aspects, does not know an awful lot about this site — it cannot be sound to spend vast amounts of time and money in burning carbon to take waste the whole way to Parkgate and then the whole way back into Belfast. From an environmental point of view, that just does not seem to be on. Therefore, a full environmental impact assessment should have been carried out on this application and the very strong ecological and environmental arguments should have been taken into consideration.

If I have caused offence to the honourable Members for South Antrim by making this contribution, I apologise, but when I saw this item on the Order Paper, I could not simply stand by and do nothing and watch yet another site be destroyed. I have been in every quarry in Northern Ireland many, many times in my 30 years of involvement in the Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group and, one by one, I have seen them disappear as wildlife refuges. The problem is that they have a deemed industrial use, through quarrying, which makes it easier for other developers to come in, take them over and use them for alternative developments, some of which are a lot less environmentally sound than quarrying.

You raised the issue of the review of old mineral permissions. I will ask the Minister this, and I expect an answer from him. I thought that he was genuinely concerned about the environment until a recent decision of his — I will not name it.

ROMPs was meant to bring those old, outstanding planning permissions for mineral extraction under control. Why have we not been allowed to see the list of ROMPs? Why has it not been published and why can the residents not find out the status of the Parkgate quarry, as far as the review of mineral consents is concerned? I am very deeply suspicious that it has not been made available to the public because it would help the debate quite considerably, not only for Parkgate quarry but for the many other quarries in Northern Ireland that we are trying to defend from unsympathetic development. I do not care about negative conditions. Once you give permission for this, the horse has well and truly bolted and nothing that the Department can do can protect the wildlife interest of this site.

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I thank all those Members who contributed to the debate. One truth is self-evident: if you are in public life, you will always be spotted, even up on Connor Road. Politicians of all creeds and views beware.

Mr McLaughlin referred to the fact that planning applications have a tendency to be subject to legal challenge and judicial review. Without commenting in much detail on this particular application, there is good evidence to confirm that that is the case. Our courts have been helpful to those

who challenge planning decisions and there are people, not involved in this application, who have demonstrated that they have the capacity, the means and the ambition to challenge legal decisions.

Therefore, in responding to the debate, I will exercise the precautionary principle. Though I will try to deal with the broad issues that have been raised during the debate, I have to adopt the precautionary principle in replying to some of the detail because this is a live application. It is a matter of some controversy, as Members have indicated, and it is in the nature of these sorts of application that controversy arises. The matter has gone before Antrim Borough Council on two occasions with a recommendation to approve. It has been withdrawn from the schedule at a late stage. There are many and varied issues under past and current consideration. For all those reasons, I have to be very vigilant, particularly given my particular competence in respect of the Planning Service, and adopt the precautionary principle. Therefore, there will be issues to which I do not respond in any great detail during this debate. That does not mean that I am disregarding any of the issues raised by Members, it is just that I am being judicious in handling all the matters.

That said, I will ensure that a copy of the debate is forwarded to my colleague Minister Ford; to Anne Garvey, who is the head of planning; and to the divisional planning office, so that each and every matter that has been raised can be —

Mr McGlone: Do you mean Minister Kennedy?

Mr Attwood: Who did I say?

Mr McGlone: Minister Ford.

Mr Attwood: Sorry, I meant Minister Kennedy. I apologise.

5.45 pm

Mr Attwood: So, I will ensure that a copy of the Hansard report is forwarded to all relevant Ministers and officials to ensure that each and all issues raised can be interrogated.

We in government need to create certainty and avoid doubt. That is a legal maxim, but it is one that applies to the conduct of government and the character of good government. Whether in the planning system that means a favourable or less than favourable outcome, there should be certainty and avoidance of doubt where there has been good evidence and good process. In respect of this application, the time is approaching when we need to create certainty and avoid doubt, given that it has been in the planning system since October 2005. That is only fair and reasonable for the applicant and the objectors and for the standards of good government.

Although there are clearly matters that need to be somewhat further interrogated, it is time for this matter to be determined in whatever way it is determined. That is not to prejudge the outcome, even though there is a recommendation to approve. That is, I just think, necessary in order for the credibility and reputation of the planning system to be addressed.

I thank Members for raising this issue. I have been fully briefed on it. As Members know, it is unusual for a current planning application to be discussed in this forum prior to a decision being taken. That does not mean that this is in

any way irregular. It reflects the scale of concern that was shared across all Members who spoke in the debate.

As I said, however, I have to be mindful that the Department is engaged in a statutory process that is yet to be concluded. Therefore, I have to warn myself as to what I can and cannot say. Part of the statutory process involves the legal requirement to consult with the council, which has not yet been done. Therefore, I will restrict some of my comments.

As was said, the proposals date back to 2005 and are for a waste transfer facility for inert construction and demolition waste, and an adjacent landfill facility, again for inert construction and demolition waste, within an existing hard rock quarry on the Connor Road at Parkgate village, County Antrim.

There is a current planning approval, and it is not dead. It is live. There could be activities at the quarry, and I am satisfied that whatever the history of the quarry, whenever quarry work stopped, the legal position — and I am satisfied that it is the legal position — is that there is a current approval in respect of that matter.

Mr Girvan: Minister, did you ever meet any of the objectors in relation to that application? I know there was a meeting with the applicant. Was the same afforded to the objectors?

Mr Attwood: Absolutely. As Mr Ford and Mr Kinahan will confirm, there were two meetings, on separate occasions, with delegations led on one occasion by Mr Kinahan and on another by Mr Ford, when I met residents. So, absolutely, I have been mindful about the issues of residents in the neighbourhood, and Mr Kinahan and Mr Ford can testify to that. Indeed, Mr Ford indicated in his comments that, on more than one occasion, I have used the good authority of my office to involve myself in this matter, and I think that that is on public record.

I have made my position clear on planning applications for waste disposal. Waste of all sorts is a feature of our society and must be dealt with safely and properly in a way that deals with the needs of relevant stakeholders while protecting the environment and the everyday lives of people who live in the locality of waste disposal facilities.

As with a proposal of this nature, as I indicated, the planning applications have been locally controversial and generated strong local objection on the grounds of road safety, noise, odour, water quality and flooding, impacts on air quality, pest control and the impact on the character of the local area. Although I have not interrogated this case in that detail and, therefore, am not commenting on this matter in particular, given the standards that will be expected around the community planning functions of local councils, and given the direction of travel that is very live at the moment with community involvement in the pre-application process, I would like to think that there would be appropriate consultations by applicants with local communities in a matter of this scale and significance. That is part of the new culture of planning that will be included in the new planning law. That should be the basis on which any current planning application is dealt with.

In response to Mr Girvan's question, the applications were accompanied by an environmental impact statement, as is normal with such proposals. The Department consulted widely, including the NIEA — Northern Ireland Environment Agency — and Antrim Borough Council's environmental

health department, which has not raised any objections about noise or any associated matters and is content that the current regulatory process is sufficient for approval. We consulted the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's Rivers Agency, which has not raised any particular issues. Members spoke about water on farmland — I acknowledge that matter — but did not refer to the flooding of Parkgate village, and the Rivers Agency had no issues about that flooding issue either. We also consulted NI Water, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment's Geological Survey of Northern Ireland and the Department for Regional Development's Roads Service.

Based on the assessment of all the relevant factors — the nature and location of the proposals; the development plan; environmental information and mitigation; measures in the environmental impact statement; public objection; and all the narratives that have been outlined by Members — the Department has reached the position whereby it was considered that a recommendation to approve could be presented at Antrim Borough Council, and it would then be up to the council to make its comments. However, given the queries raised by Mr Kinahan and Mr Ford — Mr McCrea has also been attentive to the matter — about the process of the applications, including the applicants' ability to meet access requirements agreed with Roads Service that was scoped out by a number of Members, without making an assessment of those queries, on a *prime facie* basis, I considered that it was appropriate that this should be withdrawn from the schedule. Those matters have now been raised in a more substantial and material way and are being interrogated by the planning system.

I will be very quick, Mr Deputy Speaker. That is why the applications were removed from the last council schedule, and the issues raised are being considered as part of the ongoing determination of the applications. I, therefore, can say no more until my officials have fully considered the matters and revisited their original conclusion that the applications could be approved. Further letters of objection, including those mentioned by Mr Kinahan and Mr Ford, need to be responded to, and I have asked that that be done expeditiously, bearing in mind the fact that the applications are seven years old. A recommendation on both applications will be made to Antrim Borough Council in due course, in line with the statutory requirements set out in the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991. The council will then have an opportunity to make its position known.

Mr Wells: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Attwood: Yes.

Mr Wells: I can understand the Minister's invidious position. However, he has not answered the question of the secrecy on the issue of ROMPs nor why he was unforthcoming with that vital information, which would help those in favour and those against the application.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Minister, we have to finish by 5.55 pm.

Mr Attwood: By 5.55 pm, so I have 30 seconds.

I will make two comments in conclusion. I will circulate the Hansard report, and given the concerns that have been expressed, will have an answer prepared for all matters that have been raised as part of the ongoing planning consideration.

In reply to Mr Wells: there is no secrecy. Obligations fall on the Governments in Britain and on us for assessments of ongoing quarry operations. For economic reasons, those assessments have not been undertaken. The policy and the legal situation is that independent of the ROMPs assessment, applications still need to be considered and assessed. A process has to be undertaken for ongoing quarrying operations and assessments, which is without prejudice to any further application that might arise for a quarry. That is the legal situation and is not a matter of secrecy. It is a matter of the law on the one hand and ongoing good practice on the other. In that regard, I will provide further details to the Member.

Adjourned at 5.55 pm.

Committee Stages

Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Social Development

23 February 2012

Pensions Bill [NIA 3/11-15]

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Alex Maskey (Chairperson)
Mr Mickey Brady (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Paula Bradley
Mrs Judith Cochrane
Mr Michael Copeland
Mr Sammy Douglas
Mr Mark H Durkan
Mr Alex Easton
Mr Fra McCann

Witnesses:

Mr Seamus Cassidy
Mr Gerry McCann
Ms Anne McCleary
Ms Doreen Roy

*Department for Social
Development*

The Chairperson: I thank members for their indulgence in returning at 1.30 pm; I also thank the departmental officials for being here once again to help us to work our way through this. I declare this part of the meeting officially open. We will continue to deal with the Committee Stage of the Pensions Bill. With us from the Department are Anne McCleary, Gerry McCann, Seamus Cassidy and Doreen Roy.

I remind members that we agreed, hopefully, to conclude our clause-by-clause scrutiny of the Bill today. That will enable us to compile a report, which we will approve — or otherwise — next week. That will keep us well within the 30-day time limit that the Committee has for its consideration of this part of the Bill. We agreed this morning that we will take a few minutes to allow members to air comments or to propose amendments to any of the clauses, although most of the discussion will probably relate to clause 1 and the issues therein. I suspect that, once we get beyond clause 1, there will be a speedy disposal of the rest of the clauses. Although, in saying that, I never like to tempt fate too much.

We are open for business. There are 34 clauses in the Bill, and most of the contention was about clause 1. I propose that we have a brief discussion without rehearsing all the arguments for and against the provisions; we will simply go through the clauses. If members have any suggestions about how they might fix what they believe to be a problem, they can talk about those in general terms. We will then put any amendments to the Committee.

A late submission from the Women's Support Network, which is in the tabled items folder, was circulated to members earlier this week. We also have a report from the Examiner of Statutory Rules on the scrutiny of delegated powers. In that report, the examiner did not suggest that there are any problems with the Committee's clause-by-clause scrutiny. You have received other submissions, and there has been a fair bit of discussion around the issues and a bit of toing and froing between the Committee and the officials.

I remind the Committee that some members have indicated that they want to leave fairly soon. If we can get through this as quickly as possible, we could probably do it with all or most members in attendance.

Mr F McCann: This has been a fairly long and drawn-out process; however, there are elements in the Bill, particularly around clause 1, with which we have difficulties. I know that members asked whether they could table amendments for today; unfortunately, we have not yet reached that deadline. Regardless of how discussions go today, we reserve our right to return to it. If we so wish, I think that we can table amendments between now and Consideration Stage.

The Chairperson: That is fair enough, Fra. Does anybody else have a view that they want to put?

Mr Brady: I want to raise the fundamental point about people being in agreement or not with the equalisation age and particularly how that will affect women. It has already started to take effect: women, in particular, who should have got the state pension are losing out by 18 months to two years, and those who should have qualified for pension credit are losing out, in some cases by up to £70 a week. That has already started to kick in.

My other issue is with the universal credit. The Government stated that their poverty line is £170 a week, yet the proposed pension in the universal credit will be £140 to £145 a week. That is approximately £30 a week below the Government's stated poverty levels. There is a certain dichotomy there.

The Chairperson: As I said, if we have any proposed remedies, we will deal with them today. Last week, we discussed the anomalous situation that 7,000-odd women find themselves in with the delay in their qualification for the pension. In fairness, Gerry offered to meet anybody who wanted to go through some of the detail on that. Fra pointed out that he and Sinn Féin have not reached the point at which we want to table a specific amendment; however, he has drawn attention to the fact that we may still do that.

Today could be as simple as people saying that, at this point, they are prepared to support a clause or vote against it for a number of reasons. There is an issue of the anomalous position that some women find themselves in, and we have already established that, at the outset, that would probably be about £57 million. However, Gerry identified other issues last week that could further complicate the situation, not least the problems with the IT system and the consequences for other people who may wish to take it up. We also then come to the big beast in the room that is parity. There are issues around that that people will probably want time to look at in some detail.

I feel that perhaps one way of taking those women out of that anomalous position would be to put back the date

of 18 November. I am told that that would lead to other consequential complications, so I do not want to table a specific amendment to do that. However, I am looking at an amendment that I might table later. I must decide whether or not I support clause 1 on the basis that I am not satisfied with it, but that I have not tabled a particular amendment. I have the option of voting against it, and I am trying to work it out in my mind.

Mr Brady: We were told that this provision is based on the premise of moving the pensionable age forward and equalising it. We were also told that people are living longer and, in theory, should be able to work longer. However, all the evidence that we hear in the Health Committee is that people are living longer but they are not living more healthily. Therefore, that negates that argument.

According to the Chief Medical Officer, those who live on Finaghy Road South have a life expectancy that is 10 years longer than those who live in Belfast city centre. Therefore, although people who live in Finaghy could perhaps work to all sorts of ages, there are prevailing circumstances that that one-size-fits-all approach does not cover. In the areas in which the provision will impact the most, people have more health problems, poverty is more rife, and there are more vulnerable people of whom pensioners are among the most vulnerable. It strikes me as anomalous that unclaimed pension credit is going back to the Government, yet the money is unavailable for people's contributory entitlement to the state pension.

The Chairperson: People have drawn to my attention the issue, which Mickey just mentioned, of the possibility of linking pensions with the health profile. We have seen it elsewhere, where similar types of amendment have been considered. People are saying that you are living longer in general terms but are not necessarily healthier, so has any thought been given to a linkage with health? I am simply asking a question. I presume that I know the answer, but I want to ask it anyway.

Mr Gerry McCann (Department for Social Development): The short answer to that is no, not really. It is a state pension scheme, and to do that would make it an extremely complicated system to run. The other thing, which is a point that we have made in the past, is that even though people are living longer, they are living a life that is also healthier for longer. It is not that they stay healthy for all their days. I take it that those two things are facts. However, we do accept that, at the end of people's lives, they will not be as healthy as they once were.

The Chairperson: On the winter fuel payment linkage, I am not clear as to whether the winter fuel payment is triggered at pensionable age, which is what I thought that you were saying, but then the Committee Clerk drew my attention to a piece of legislation that states that it comes in at the age of 60.

Mr G McCann: That law was changed as part of the other changes to the state pension age, so it is actually now straightforwardly linked to the pension age in law.

The Chairperson: The difficulty is that we are looking at legislation that is subject to other legislation. There are so many changes that it is difficult to keep up. The Committee Clerk mentioned that precise caveat, that it is difficult to keep track of some of the changes that have happened. For me, there are three areas of contention around clause

1. One is the linkages to the fuel payment, which is one of the passport benefits triggered by pension age; the second is the issue of the health profile as opposed to the age possibly being linked in there somewhere; and then there is the anomalous position that some women find themselves in. There are three areas of concern that I find, but I do not feel competent to propose an amendment on any of those things at the moment because of the understandable complications around them. I am left with the choice of voting either for or against the clause. That is what I am trying to think through.

Mr G McCann: Once again, I say to any member of the Committee that if they want us to assist them at any point to look at any issues, we would be very happy to do so.

The Chairperson: I appreciate that. Obviously, whatever comes through the Committee today will go back to the House again, so there will be more debate on the issue anyhow. Thanks, Gerry, for that offer. If no one else wants to contribute to the discussion, I propose that we move on to the clause-by-clause consideration.

Clause 1 (Equalisation of and increase in pensionable age for men and women)

The Chairperson: I have to read some of this out, so people will have to bear with me; it is not that I like the sound of my own voice. We have already had some discussion, with both the stakeholders and the Department, on the issues, some of which I have already covered under the heading "Transitional Arrangements". If there are no further comments, I will put the Question. This will just be a show of hands. Are members in favour of clause 1 as drafted?

Question put, That the Committee is content with the clause.

The Committee divided: Ayes 3; Noes 4; Abstentions 2.

AYES

Ms P Bradley, Mr Douglas, Mr Easton.

NOES

Mr Brady, Mr Durkan, Mr F McCann, Mr A Maskey.

ABSTENTIONS

Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 1 disagreed to.

The Chairperson: OK. Was the clause agreed by the Committee or not?

The Committee Clerk: It was four three against.

The Chairperson: OK. Am I still in a position to go through this — is there no consequential consideration for clause 2?

The Committee Clerk: It does not change anything; it features in the Committee's report to the Assembly, and the Assembly can decide yes or no.

The Chairperson: I just wanted to make sure of that. Moving on —

The Bill Clerk: The Committee could oppose the clause by putting down a specific amendment.

The Chairperson: The Committee has already recorded a vote on it. That is on record.

Mr Brady: Can I ask Patricia whether we can table amendments in the interim before the Bill goes to the Assembly?

The Bill Clerk: Individually, we can table amendments outside what is decided in the Committee, but as well as recording and putting into your Committee report, there is also a facility for a Committee [*Inaudible.*] if it so wanted. The option is there. You can do that up until 9.30 am on the Thursday before the Consideration Stage is heard in the Assembly.

The Chairperson: I would have presumed that if the Committee voted one way or the other, that is what the decision of the Committee is. I am a bit confused that you are saying that we have to take another step to declare our opposition.

The Bill Clerk: You do not have to; it is just an option for you if you wanted to.

The Chairperson: We have voted against the clause.

The Bill Clerk: [*Inaudible.*]

The Chairperson: Are members content? The vote has been recorded. There is no doubt that this will come down to parties, Whips and other deliberations.

Clauses 2 to 4 agreed to.

Clause 5 (Earnings trigger for automatic enrolment and re-enrolment)

Mr Brady: Can I just clarify something? People can opt in or opt out of this enrolment, given the opportunity. That is all. I know that you went into some detail about it.

The Committee Clerk: Yes. The whole point is that if you are put into the scheme, at any point after you are presented with [*Inaudible.*]

Mr F McCann: All of this is really about occupational stuff.

The Committee Clerk: Yes, it is.

Mr F McCann: That is fine. Thanks.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 5 agreed to.

Clauses 6 and 7 agreed to.

Clause 8 (Review of earnings trigger and qualifying earnings band)

Mr Copeland: Did we do clause 6?

The Chairperson: We did clause 6, did we not?

The Bill Clerk: Yes.

The Committee Clerk: Yes.

The Chairperson: Am I going too fast?

Can we do clause 7, then? We are on clause 8. We have already done 7. Somebody else take over take over here til I get my head showered. We are on clause 8 now. All those in favour?

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 8 agreed to.

Clauses 9 to 22 agreed to.

Clause 23 (Contribution notices and financial support directions)

The Chairperson: Have I to ask whether the Committee "is content" with clauses X, Y and Z? Or are we OK? I do not want to have to go through this all over again.

Mr Brady: We can take that as read.

The Bill Clerk: You should say that at the end.

The Chairperson: Good.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 23 agreed to.

Clauses 24 to 34 agreed to.

Schedule 1 (Equalisation of and increase in pensionable age for men and women: consequential amendments)

The Chairperson: Schedule 1 contains consequential amendments flowing from the increase in pension age — for example, bringing forward amendments to increase the operation of disability living allowance, widows pension and the minimum age for attendance allowance, state pension credit, and so on.

This is like clause 1. I remind members, in case they are not following this intently. If you are against clause 1, you are likely to be against schedule 1. However, it is not for me to direct you.

Question put, That the Committee is content with the schedule.

The Committee divided: Ayes 3; Noes 4; Abstentions 2.

AYES

Ms P Bradley, Mr Douglas, Mr Easton.

NOES

Mr Brady, Mr Durkan, Mr F McCann, Mr A Maskey.

ABSTENTIONS

Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland.

Question accordingly negatived.

Schedule 1 disagreed to.

Schedules 2 to 4 agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

The Chairperson: Thank you, members. That was expeditiously conducted. No doubt we will return to the fray in the Chamber. That concludes the formal clause-by-clause scrutiny of the Bill. Next week, we will have a draft report back, which we will confirm or otherwise. I thank Gerry, Anne, Seamus and Doreen. Thank you very much for your attendance again and your support.

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 24 February 2012

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Religious Discrimination: Marriage

Mr McKay asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action their Department is taking to ensure that no organisation bars its members from marrying persons on the basis of their religion.
(AQW 2148/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 makes discrimination on grounds of religious belief unlawful in the fields of employment, education, training, goods, facilities and services and premises. However, this legislation does not apply to membership of private clubs.

Religious Discrimination: Employment

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in light of their responsibility for equality, whether they have any plans to cause a review of the provisions of employment legislation which means that teachers in schools are not protected in employment against discrimination on the grounds of religious belief.
(AQW 5441/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 makes discrimination on grounds of religious belief unlawful in the fields of employment, education, training, goods, facilities and services and premises.

The legislation does not, however, apply to the recruitment of teachers (Article 71).

Responsibility for the underlying policy in relation to the teachers' exemption and whether or not it is to be retained, modified or abolished rests with the Department of Education. OFMDFM would not envisage making any amendments to this section of the Fair Employment and Treatment Order without the full involvement of the Department of Education on the underlying policy. Therefore, OFMDFM is not planning a review.

However, we understand that the Department of Education has recently undertaken a review of recruitment opportunities in the teaching sector and this will shortly be submitted to the Minister of Education.

Play and Leisure Strategic Partnerships

Mrs Overend asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the implementation of the Play and Leisure Policy since March 2011.
(AQW 6817/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Since March 2011 we have engaged fourteen councils to establish play and leisure strategic partnerships to ensure a joined-up approach to the planning and commissioning of play and leisure services to meet the needs of local children, and we are currently engaging with the other twelve councils. We have additionally delivered seminars on risk-taking in play

and on shaping communities to be play and child friendly; and invested in exemplar projects across council areas on new and innovative play areas.

Economic Advice

Mr Lunn asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the process that is in place for the Executive to receive independent economic advice, compared to that of the Scottish Government and the Welsh Assembly Government.

(AQW 7272/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: When independent economic advice is sought by Executive Ministers, it is obtained through the normal procurement process consistent with Central Procurement Directorate public procurement policy. Key considerations would involve the application of appropriate eligibility and selection criteria, including value for money, level of expertise, relevance and experience reflecting the specific requirements of the tender. Departmental economists provide advice to departments in support of investment appraisal, policy formulation, implementation and evaluation.

In addition, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade & Investment commissioned the Independent Review of Economic Policy (IREP) in 2009, to undertake a root and branch assessment of how DETI supports business in Northern Ireland. The independent panel was chaired by Professor Richard Barnett, Vice Chancellor of the University of Ulster. One of the recommendations from the review was the formation of an Economic Advisory Group. The Group was established on 28 May 2010 with the primary role to provide the DETI Minister with independent economic advice.

Similarly in Scotland, the work of the Scottish Government is supported by a range of economic advice from analysts within the Scottish Government and, on occasion, by externally commissioned research. In 2007, the Scottish Government established the Council of Economic Advisers to provide expert economic advice to Ministers drawing on expertise from the academic and business communities.

In Wales, most economic research is commissioned externally. The Welsh Government has an Economic Research Advisory Panel whose purpose it is to advise the Welsh Government on a programme of economic research, monitoring and evaluation.

Mobile Phone Applications

Mr McKay asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) any mobile phone applications that have been designed by their Department, and its arm's length bodies, for use by members of the public; and (ii) any that are currently being developed.

(AQW 7537/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: No mobile phone applications have been designed by our Department or any of its arm's length bodies for use by members of the public, nor are any currently being developed.

Ilex: Regeneration Projects

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in relation to their Department's Business Plan 2011/12, for an update on the objective to implement the recommendations in the review of Ilex for the improved delivery of regeneration in Derry-Londonderry by October 2011.

(AQW 7588/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Ilex and sponsor departments have made progress in the implementation of recommendations following the publication of the review of Ilex in 2011.

Progress has been made in the development of both internal and external relationships, processes and performance along with a number of organisational improvements. These have contributed to the implementation of a number of Ilex regeneration objectives, such as completion of the Peace Bridge and the completion of Ebrington Square at Ebrington Parade Ground.

Departments continue to monitor progress and to work with Ilex to improve delivery or regeneration work in the City.

Recruitment Agencies: OFMDFM Spend

Dr McDonnell asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the amount paid to recruitment agencies for (i) full-time; and (ii) part-time posts in their Department, and its arm's-length bodies, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 7740/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Temporary workers are procured through recruitment agencies within a central DFP framework contract. Temporary workers may include administrative staff and staff in specialist areas for example, accountants.

The current contract, which has been in place since December 2011, also allows our ALBs, who cannot access NICS casual staff, to access the framework to engage temporary staff.

	2008/2009		2009/2010		2010/2011	
	Full time	Part time	Full time	Part time	Full time	Part time
Department	£82,074		£83,777		£18,307	
Arms Length Bodies	£351,575	£103,208	£351,741	£177,853	£238,498	£23,965

Social Protection Fund

Mr Swann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister which Departments have submitted bids for funds from the Social Protection Fund for the 2012/13 financial year.

(AQW 7849/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: As we said in answer to AQO 1213/11-15 on 6 February, the Executive established a Social Protection Fund to assist those most in need within the wider community.

This year the Executive agreed to prioritise fuel poverty through this fund and agreed that the entire £20 million budget would contribute towards a Winter Fuel Poverty Payment Scheme, brought forward by DSD and DHSSPS, under the Financial Assistance Act.

While funding for the programme was only secured for this financial year, the Budget document outlined our intention to seek additional money in years 2, 3 and 4 of this budget period from additional revenue streams identified by Ministers coming into operation and delivering new resources for deployment.

Our officials are continuing discussions with departmental colleagues to develop proposals that will target our most vulnerable individuals. These would then be capable of early consideration once the necessary funding has been secured.

Maze/Long Kesh: Development Board

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) why there has been a delay in the appointment of the Chairperson and Board of the Maze/Long Kesh Development Board; and (ii) when the appointments will be confirmed.

(AQW 7851/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The recent public appointments competition to establish the Board did not identify a suitable candidate for the Chair of the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation Board and we are currently considering the way forward.

In order to ensure that the members of the Board have the necessary range of skills, including business and development expertise, we will shortly be re-advertising under the Public Appointments process in order to attract a broader pool.

We will be retaining the current pool of successful board members from the last competition and hope to have the Development Corporation Board operational by early summer 2012.

Civil Service: Posts

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many Civil Service posts existed in their Department at (i) Administrative Assistant; (ii) Administrative Officer; (iii) Executive Officer 2; (iv) Executive Officer 1; (v) Staff Officer; (vi) Deputy Principal; (vii) Grade 7; and (viii) Grade 6 levels, at the beginning of (a) 2007; and (b) 2012, broken down by local Council area.

(AQW 7858/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The vast majority of posts in our Department are based in the Stormont Estate. Small teams operate outside the Belfast City Council area and these are shown in the table below.

Grade level (includes analogous grades)	Number of posts at April 2007			Number of posts at February 2012		
	Belfast City Council	Armagh City & District Council	Derry City Council	Belfast City Council	Armagh City & District Council	Derry City Council
AA	20	2		14	1	
AO	68	1	3	51	1	3
EO II	44	2		43	3	
EO I	37	2		26		
SO	66	4		58	2	
DP	59	3		67	3	
Grade 7	41	1		41	1	
Grade 6	3			2		
Total	338	15	3	302	11	3

Ebrington Parade Ground

Mr P Ramsey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) how many applications were received for all services tendered for the opening of the Ebrington Barracks site; and (ii) the constituency in which each successful company is based.

(AQW 7925/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Ilex procured an Events Management company to manage the opening of Ebrington Parade Ground. In line with procurement guidelines this opportunity was publicly advertised and three applications, one based in Dromore, one based in Derry/Londonderry and a joint venture between a Derry/Londonderry firm and a firm based in the North West of England, were received and assessed. The successful company is based in Dromore, but engages staff from across the region.

In the Terms of Reference issued for this role, Ilex requested that applicants would demonstrate a commitment to sourcing goods and services locally. As a consequence of this, almost 70% of goods and services for the event have been procured locally. Services were sought from a total of 103 suppliers. Of the 74 successful companies, local suppliers are located as follows:

Derry~Londonderry	52 suppliers
Down	10 suppliers
Antrim	9 suppliers

There are three successful suppliers beyond Northern Ireland.

Human Resources

Dr McDonnell asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many staff are employed in their Department's Human Resources section.

(AQW 7938/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We currently employ 6 staff in our Human Resources team (5 Full-Time Equivalent).

Strategic Support Funding 2012-13

Mr Elliott asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what measures are in place to ensure that there is no delay in providing victims and survivors groups with Strategic Support Funding in the 2012/13 financial year.

(AQW 7964/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Funding for Strategic Support Funding (SSF) for 2012-13 has been confirmed and procedures have been put in place to ensure that there will be no requirement to extend existing SSF contracts into next year.

It is fully intended that the Letters of Offer for 2012-13 will issue to successful applicants by 31 March 2012 to ensure that there is no delay in the provision of funding.

The Community Relations Council is fully committed to meeting this deadline.

Arm's-length Bodies: Expenditure

Mr Moutray asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the planned expenditure of their Department's arm's-length bodies in each (i) constituency; and (ii) council area, in the next 12 months.

(AQW 7984/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM arm's length bodies are unable to analyse their planned expenditure into constituency and council areas. The majority of their spend is grant funding and this is dependent upon the geographical spread of applications received.

Racism Strategy

Mr Moutray asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when they expect to announce a new racism strategy.

(AQW 7985/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Work continues to develop a new Strategy to replace "A Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland 2005-2010" and the Racial Equality Panel has discussed this at meetings during 2011. This work will continue to progress over the coming months.

We remain committed to developing the new Strategy through a partnership process with minority ethnic groups and the wider community, as we did with the original Strategy.

Once this development process is completed it is anticipated that an announcement will be made about consultation on the draft.

Children and Young People's Strategy

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 7512/11-15, to detail when the review of progress against the indicators in the Strategy will be completed, and to explain why this piece of work is currently eight months overdue.

(AQW 8028/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The review of progress against the indicators in the Children and Young People's Strategy will be completed by March 2012. The delay has been due to the need to ensure the evaluation incorporates the latest 2010-11 data.

Arm's-length Bodies

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to list the arm's-length bodies and third party organisations that report to them.

(AQW 8029/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We sponsor a number of arm's length bodies, listed below, most of which are Executive Non-Departmental Public Bodies. We also sponsor a Tribunal Non-Departmental Public Body and two statutory office holders. In addition, two of the organisations we support are treated as third party organisations but our Department, in conjunction with DFP, is currently considering whether these should be reclassified as Executive Non-Departmental Public Bodies.

Body	Classification
The Commissioner for Children and Young People for NI	Executive Non Departmental Public Body
The Commission for Victims and Survivors for NI	Executive Non Departmental Public Body
The Commissioner for Older People for NI	Executive Non Departmental Public Body
The Equality Commission for NI	Executive Non Departmental Public Body
Ilex Urban Regeneration Company Ltd	Executive Non Departmental Public Body
Strategic Investment Board Ltd	Executive Non Departmental Public Body
NI Judicial Appointments Commission	Executive Non Departmental Public Body
Planning and Water Appeals Commissions	Tribunal Non Departmental Public Body
Commissioner for Public Appointments for NI	Statutory Office Holder
Attorney General for NI	Statutory Office Holder
NI Community Relations Council	Treated as a third party organisation
NI Memorial Fund	Treated as a third party organisation

Strategic Support Fund: FAIR Application

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 6929/11-15, given that the information requested does not include the content of the legal advice provided, to detail (i) when the Departmental Solicitor's Office received a request for guidance from the Community Relations Council, in relation to the Strategic Support Fund application by FAIR; and (ii) why there has been a delay in providing a response.

(AQW 8199/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We refer to our answer previously given to AQW 6929/11-15. This question relates to the provision of legal advice by the Departmental Solicitor's Office to a Public Body. The provision of such advice is confidential and privileged. Therefore it is not appropriate for us to discuss or comment on such provision.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Human Resources

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many staff are employed in her Department's Human Resources section.

(AQW 7758/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): My Department has 35 staff (32.6 Full-time Equivalent) staff employed in its Human Resources section.

Single Farm Payments

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much has been paid out in this round of Single Farm Payments; and how much has still to be paid.

(AQW 7778/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: A total of 37,854 potentially eligible applications were submitted under the 2011 Single Farm Payment Scheme. At 10 February, some 34,627 (91.5%) of these applications have been finalised and a total of £239 million paid out to farmers. There remains, potentially, up to £28 million still to be paid. Not all of the remaining claims will be due a payment because of ineligibility or the application of penalties under scheme rules.

EU regulations require Paying Agencies, including my Department, to pay out at least 95.24% of its available 2011 SFP budget by 30 June 2012 in order to avoid them incurring late payment penalties.

Equality Unit

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the (i) number; and (ii) annual cost of staff employed in her Department's Equality Unit.

(AQW 7795/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There is a total of 4 staff employed in the DARD Equality Unit, all of which are part-time. The annual cost of employing these staff is £121,725.

Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the timescale for the implementation of the proposed Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012.

(AQW 7798/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The proposed Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments) Regulations (NI) 2012 have recently been the subject of a public consultation that closed on 10 January 2012. The consultation issued to over 2,000 consultees and has given dog breeders, specialist interest groups, Councils and the general public the opportunity to comment on the proposals. A substantial number of responses were received and my officials are currently analysing these. In the coming weeks I will be considering all the responses before deciding the final detail of the draft Regulations. I anticipate that the ARD Committee will have the opportunity to scrutinise the draft Regulations in March 2012, following which I will seek Executive agreement to lay them in the Assembly for debate under the draft affirmative resolution procedure. Subject to approval by the Assembly, the Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishment) Regulations would come into operation during April 2012.

Fertilisers: Cost to Farmers

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department is taking to help reduce the price of fertilisers for farmers.

(AQW 7859/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Fertiliser prices are driven by the interaction of international demand and supply conditions and by energy prices. Therefore, it is not possible for me, or for government, to influence these drivers.

My Department is, however, working with farmers to help them minimise their requirements for chemical fertiliser inputs through a range of measures including; training workshops, nutrient management planning and capital grant support.

In recent years the College of Agriculture Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) delivered Nutrient Management Planning workshops to over 2027 farmers. These workshops focused on the interpretation of soil analysis, the value of slurry and manure, chemical fertiliser requirements to grow successful crops, understanding the Nitrates Directive and hands-on use of nutrient management decision support programmes to help farmers calculate nutrient content of slurry applications. These support tools are available through the RuralNI website.

Research at the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) has shown that spreading slurry by a trailing-shoe system gave a 26% improvement in total Nitrogen utilisation compared to conventional splash plate method. The resulting improved grass yield is equivalent to applying chemical nitrogen fertiliser at a rate of 44 kg per hectare.

Therefore, my Department is providing capital grant support to farmers to encourage uptake of advanced slurry spreading equipment such as the trailing shoe system under the Manure Efficiency Technology Scheme (METS). This equipment achieves greater nutrient efficiency from slurry and therefore reduces chemical fertiliser requirements and input costs for farmers. This has been promoted through Slurry Efficiency workshops for farmers run by CAFRE.

In 2009 CAFRE has launched a Grass / Clover Monitor Farm technology project. The project encourages farmers to use clover in grass swards to fix atmospheric nitrogen. It is particularly relevant on beef and sheep farms where the use of chemical fertilizer is generally lower than on dairy farms. With the significant increase in chemical fertilizer costs training and development work over the past three years has focussed on reducing costs through the CAFRE technologists and advisers working with groups of farmers throughout the north.

Ranunculus Fluitans

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether *Ranunculus fluitans* has been added to any waterway by her Department in the last 25 years; and if so, what was the rationale for its addition.

(AQW 7913/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has not added *Ranunculus fluitans* to any waterway in the last 25 years.

Slaughterhouses: CCTV

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she would consider bringing forward proposals which would make CCTV mandatory for all slaughter houses to ensure that animal welfare laws are upheld.

(AQW 8003/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There is no evidence in the north of Ireland to suggest that compulsory CCTV is necessary to prevent acts of animal cruelty in slaughterhouses and I have no plans at the moment to introduce legislation to make it so. However, if there was evidence that the introduction of compulsory CCTV would significantly improve animal welfare here, I would certainly consider introducing legislation to do so.

I would advise that we have a total of 20 slaughterhouses here. 13 have already installed CCTV voluntarily. Two further plants have CCTV in place but not in the stunning area. The five remaining meat plants are small.

I can assure you that my Department and I take the welfare of animals very seriously. Veterinary Officers from my Department are present in all approved slaughterhouses during times of slaughter each day to verify that the slaughterhouse operator fulfils their obligations under the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1996.

Late last year I met Kate Fowler, Animal Aid's Campaign Manager, to discuss CCTV in slaughterhouses. I made the point that my officials have a constant presence at point of slaughter. I also pointed out that in one of the highly publicised cases of animal cruelty in a slaughterhouse in Britain the plant did have CCTV installed and that this did not prevent the welfare incident occurring. So CCTV is not the perfect solution that some advocates maintain.

My Department is currently considering the role CCTV might play in helping ensure business operators comply with their obligations under EC Regulation 1099/2009, on the welfare of animals at the time of killing, which comes into effect on 1 January 2013. At my request, my veterinary officials have alerted the red meat industry to the potential benefits of CCTV in meat plants and have encouraged them to use it on a voluntary basis.

To consider making the installation of CCTV mandatory I have to be mindful of the fact there are only five small slaughterhouses that currently do not have CCTV in place. Rather than bringing forward legislation, I would prefer to try and secure agreement from the 5 remaining plants to install CCTV voluntarily. I intend to approach the slaughterhouses directly on this matter. However, if I feel that it is necessary to consider the introduction of compulsory monitoring using CCTV, I would want to assess the available evidence and also to examine developments in Britain and the south with input from stakeholders, including animal welfare groups and slaughterhouse operators, before making any such decision.

Questions for Written Answer: Stationery Costs

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much her Department has spent on stationery costs in replying to Assembly Written Questions, including the price of the envelopes and paper used, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8049/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The information being sought is not available as the Department does not routinely estimate stationery costs incurred in answering Assembly Written Questions.

Trees: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the areas in North Down in which her Department is planning to increase the tree population.

(AQW 8055/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I would like to see more trees planted throughout the whole of the north of Ireland, including North Down, to achieve our long term aim of increasing woodland cover to 12% of land area.

I announced to the Assembly, in November 2011, a review of the support arrangements for private planting, in order to find better ways to persuade landowners to plant trees. This report will feed into the new Rural Development Programme.

'Agri-food: A Study for Cross-border Co-operation'

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when she received the Intertradelreland report Agri-Food: A Study for Cross-Border Cooperation.

(AQW 8079/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: At its meeting on 17 January 2012 the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment. This correspondence included the report from Intertradelreland on 'Agri-Food: A Study for Cross Border Co-Operation'. The Chair of the Agriculture Committee subsequently forwarded the report to me and it was received in my office on 20 January 2012.

Strangford Lough: Sailing

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she is taking to ensure that the sailing fraternity on Strangford Lough are consulted on all matters relating to Strangford Lough. **(AQW 8136/11-15)**

Mrs O'Neill: My Department's responsibilities are restricted to fisheries issues in Strangford Lough. However where any proposals might affect other users, the Department will ensure there is full consultation, including sailing interests if necessary and the Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership where sailing interests are represented.

Strangford Lough: Horse Mussel Reefs

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to list the communications her Department has had with Europe, over the last ten years, in relation to the Strangford Lough Horse Mussel reef issue.

(AQW 8137/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has communicated directly and indirectly with the European Commission over the last ten years in relation to the protection and restoration of Strangford Lough Horse Mussel (*Modiolus modiolus*) reefs.

On 18th June 2004 the European Commission wrote to our Representative asking what measures the Member State proposed to comply with Articles 2.2 & 6.2 of Habitats Directive 92/43 EEC in order to protect the *Modiolus* communities in the Strangford Lough SAC. DARD and the DOE contributed to the response to the Commission that was issued via our Representative on 1st September 2004

The Commission wrote again to our Representative on 12th October 2005 raising concerns that the *Modiolus* reefs in the Lough were no longer in a favorable conservation status and proposing infraction unless restoration measures were undertaken.

DARD and the DOE contributed to the response to the Commission that was issued via our Representative on 23rd December 2005. This response detailed the further measures which had been implemented and outlined the *Modiolus* restoration plan. European Commission officials agreed the *Modiolus* restoration plan with DARD and DOE officials in early 2006.

There was no further communication with the Commission on the issue until 1st December 2010 when, DARD and the NIEA met the Commission along with the Fisheries Administrations in Britain to discuss implementation of the Habitats and Bird Directives in a number of protected sites throughout Britain and the north of Ireland (a "package" meeting). DARD and the NIEA contributed to a follow up response from DEFRA to the Commission with an update on the Strangford Lough Horse Mussel issue.

On 24 January 2012, DARD and the NIEA participated in a second "package" meeting with the Commission and the other Administrations. In relation to Strangford Lough further proposals for restoration and protection of horse mussels were discussed in the context of the complaint made to the Commission by the Ulster Wildlife Trust in November 2011. The Departments are currently awaiting further communication from the Commission on the matter.

Fishing Vessels: Safety

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what advice her Department has given to fishermen, and their representative bodies, regarding the funding which is available through the European Fisheries Fund for improving safety aboard fishing vessels.

(AQW 8139/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The availability of funding for projects that improve safety onboard fishing vessels has been promoted by holding information seminars in three County Down and one County Antrim fishing ports. In addition, there is regular contact with individual fishermen and their representative groups where the availability and eligibility of funding is often discussed with my officials.

For the past 3 years, my Department has supported a part-time EFF Facilitator to promote awareness of opportunities under the Programme and provide fishermen with information and assistance in completing application forms. The DARD website provides information on the European Fisheries Fund Measures open for applications and a link to guidance notes for potential applicants, including a set specifically tailored to the vessel modernisation measure.

Fishing Vessels: Injuries

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many injuries aboard fishing vessels have been reported in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8141/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department does not compile records of injuries aboard fishing vessels. Accidents involving fishing vessels and their reporting and investigation are the responsibility of the Department of Transport. Its agency, the Marine Accident Investigation Branch, reports on accidents at sea and annual and other reports can be found at: <http://www.maib.gov.uk/publications>

Fishing Vessels: Safety

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what advice and assistance her Department gives to fishermen, and their representative bodies, to improve safety aboard fishing vessels.

(AQW 8142/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: It is the responsibility of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency to provide advice and guidance to fishermen on how to improve safety onboard fishing vessels, with my Department's role limited to advising the industry of the availability of funding opportunities for safety-focused improvements through the European Fisheries Fund.

To date, under the European Fisheries Fund's Vessel Modernisation Measure, my Department has awarded £167,000 grant support to 17 applicants to undertake £400,000 worth of safety-related investment onboard their vessels. A further £156,000 grant support has been offered to representative bodies to deliver 3 safety initiatives across the entire fleet, that focus on buoyancy aids, Man-overboard Guardians and the stability of our Under 15m fleet.

Fishing: Non-attendance at Meeting

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why neither she, nor any of her officials, attended a meeting with representatives of the Portavogie fishing industry and the UK Fisheries Minister Richard Benyon, MP on 7 February 2012; and to outline her diary commitments for that day.

(AQW 8163/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The visit by Richard Benyon to Portavogie and Kilkeel on 7th February 2012 was arranged by the NIO and DEFRA. I and my Department were only informed of the visit on 30th January 2012. At this late stage my prior diary commitments meant that I was unable to attend. These commitments included a meeting with the Chief Executive of BT Ireland, a meeting with students in advance of the

Greenmount Centenary Careers event, and the first of the DARD Stakeholder events on CAP Reform. The 7th February was also an Assembly sitting day.

However, I was able to meet with Richard Benyon on Monday 6th February and we had a useful discussion about a range of fisheries issues.

My officials were not expressly invited to attend the visits.

Rural Areas: Livestock Theft

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what contact she has had with the PSNI regarding theft in rural areas, and in particular livestock theft.

(AQW 8198/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I recently met the Chief Constable to highlight the increase in rural crime, including the rise in theft from farms, and the very high level of concern it is causing within the farming community. The Chief Constable has since written to notify me of a recent intelligence led investigation which has resulted in the recovery of stolen items including a tractor, plant and tools. As a result of this investigation I understand that an individual is to appear at Court in the coming weeks charged with handling stolen goods. I will be meeting the Chief Constable again shortly to discuss how we can work together to tackle rural crime including raising awareness of measures which farmers can take to reduce incidences of rural crime. I also want to explore how DARD Direct Offices can be used to disseminate information to rural dwellers.

The Department's Veterinary Service Enforcement Branch has also been working closely with the PSNI in dealing with rural crime including carrying out joint on farm inspections, training some members of the PSNI in areas of livestock movement and identification and establishing 24/7 communication channels.

Badgers: Vaccination

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how her Department will be able to implement an effective course of action for vaccinating badgers without conducting area-specific research.

(AQW 8233/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: We are closely tracking badger vaccine development progress in England and in the south of Ireland. It is important that we do not duplicate the expensive research work that is ongoing in other areas, but that we draw down the lessons from that work and also collaborate where appropriate. An international vaccination experts' workshop is planned on the island of Ireland for pre-summer 2012 to consider badger vaccination issues and to inform how best to proceed on badger vaccination.

My Department has commissioned a number of studies here that will inform our policy, including a Badger Population Survey which was conducted in 2007/08; and a TB Biosecurity Study which was carried out in 2010/11 in a TB high incidence area in Co. Down and which considered selected cattle and wildlife factors. The Study findings should add to our knowledge of TB risk factors and contribute to the development of best practice and biosecurity advice. Preparatory work is also underway for a study to investigate badger and cattle interactions at pasture and around cattle housing and farmyards.

Additional funding of some £4 million has been reserved in my Department's budget to commission a programme of TB and wildlife research and studies to help ensure we have well informed and evidence based strategies to address the issue of cattle to cattle spread as well as the wildlife issue. We have engaged with industry and wider stakeholders to help us identify and refine our TB evidence needs and priorities.

We will monitor closely the outputs from all these trials and studies and draw down the lessons learned, where appropriate.

Farm Modernisation Scheme

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether the third tranche of the Farm Modernisation Scheme will be targeted specifically towards farmers in Less Favoured Areas.
(AQW 8345/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I recently announced a consultation exercise on the proposed selection criteria for the third tranche of Farm Modernisation Programme.

In addition to the scheme's primary focus on modernisation of farms I am keen that the third tranche should prioritise younger farmers. I have therefore given more weight to this criterion in this tranche, however, we may consider whether targeting specific funds toward farmers in less favoured areas is required in the future

I have also introduced a new criterion awarding marks to those who have not applied for funding or received funding from the programme previously. The final criterion relates to the submitting of applications online and I would encourage as many farmers as possible to do so.

With the total funding for this tranche now £5.5m this will allow more farmers to benefit from the scheme and will provide significant support and a much needed boost to farmers and the wider economy in the current difficult economic climate.

Equality Impact Assessments/Consultations: DARD Spend

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much her Department has spent on (i) Equality Impact Assessments; and (ii) consultations in each of the last three years.
(AQW 8443/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Section 75 statutory duties make equality and good relations central to the whole range of public policy decision-making. Therefore the cost of carrying out Equality Impact Assessments and consultations are not maintained separately and cannot readily be disaggregated.

Civil Service: Posts

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many Civil Service posts existed in her Department at (i) Administrative Assistant; (ii) Administrative Officer; (iii) Executive Officer 2; (iv) Executive Officer 1; (v) Staff Officer; (vi) Deputy Principal; (vii) Grade 7; and (viii) Grade 6 levels, at the beginning of (a) 2007; and (b) 2012, broken down by Local Council area.
(AQW 7690/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: A breakdown of the information requested is provided on the attached Annex. Because of the way that the 2007 information is held it has not been possible to separate the Grade 6s and Grade 7s or the Executive Officer 1s and Executive Officer 2s.

(A) DARD PERMANENT STAFF IN POST (FULL TIME EQUIVALENT) AT 1ST JAN 2007 BY WORK LOCATION & DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA

		(vii) & (viii) Grade 6 and 7	(vi) Deputy Principal	(v) Staff Officer	(iii)&(iv) Executive Officer 1 and Executive Officer 2	(ii) Administrative Officer	(i) Administrative Assistant	Total
District Council	Antrim	7	39	107	36	24	29	242
	Ards	12	0	1	13	8	10	44
	Armagh	10	0	1	24	11	12	58
	Ballymena	9	8	9	45	17	14	102
	Belfast	86	118	233	378	195	154	1164
	Castlereagh	8	19	15	15	3	10	70
	Coleraine	27	2	11	106	21	16	183
	Cookstown	2	12	29	11	3	1	58
	Craigavon	1	4	4	9	6	5	29
	Derry	5	5	8	41	63	27	149
	Down	0	2	6	14	8	3	33
	Dungannon	12	0	1	20	11	14	58
	Fermanagh	14	5	15	43	7	8	92
	Larne	6	0	0	17	8	8	39
	Lisburn	1	2	6	9	9	5	32
	Newry & Mourne	28	5	11	90	18	18	170
	Omagh	14	6	13	39	30	25	127
Total		242	227	470	910	442	359	2650

Notes:

Includes all Permanent DARD staff

Figures are Staff Full Time Equivalent

Excludes staff on Career Break

(B) DARD PERMANENT STAFF IN POST (FULL TIME EQUIVALENT) AS AT 1 JAN 2012 BY WORK LOCATION & DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA

Local Council Area	(viii) Grade 6	(vii) Grade 7	(vi) Deputy Principal	(v) Staff Officer	(iv) Executive Officer 1	(iii) Executive Officer 2	(ii) Administrative Officer	(i) Administrative Assistant	Total
Antrim	2.0	7.0	30.3	69.5	25.0	15.1	17.5	16.8	183.3
Ards		11.2	1.0	7.0	3.0	14.6	8.0	5.6	50.4
Armagh		13.2	2.0	10.5	12.4	17.4	15.4	11.2	82.1
Ballymena		10.4	5.6	14.3	31.4	17.5	14.3	13.2	106.7
Ballymoney				2.0					2.0
Belfast	10.5	69.4	132.7	167.6	113.9	146.6	117.7	51.9	810.2
Castlereagh	3.0	7.0	17.4	14.2	12.3	2.6	5.6	1.5	63.5
Coleraine		15.0	2.0	10.6	25.0	9.7	18.1	12.9	93.3
Cookstown		5.0	17.5	41.3	23.4	6.8	10.2	10.6	114.7
Craigavon		5.0	4.5	5.0	20.0	0.6	6.0	2.0	43.1
Derry		7.4	6.0	15.0	31.6	33.8	83.1	7.0	184.0
Down			2.0	7.6	10.5	2.0	8.6	1.0	31.7
Dungannon		6.9		9.8	23.0	15.6	10.3	8.8	74.4
Fermanagh		12.3	7.0	26.4	30.3	19.6	24.8	15.2	135.7
Larne		1.0		1.0	2.0	14.0	1.0		19.0

Local Council Area	(viii) Grade 6	(vii) Grade 7	(vi) Deputy Principal	(v) Staff Officer	(iv) Executive Officer 1	(iii) Executive Officer 2	(ii) Administrative Officer	(i) Administrative Assistant	Total
Limavady				3.6	2.0	1.0		1.0	7.6
Lisburn		1.0	2.0	7.0	8.9	3.4	8.4	4.0	34.7
Magherafelt		2.6	5.8	25.5	12.6	7.0	7.3	1.4	62.2
Newry and Mourne		20.7	5.0	18.1	21.5	30.3	14.6	10.1	120.3
Newtownabbey	1.0	7.3	0.8	3.5	7.2	12.9	7.0	8.6	48.3
Omagh		9.1	8.0	20.5	22.2	19.9	29.9	13.8	123.4
Strabane		1.0					1.0	1.0	3.0
Total	16.5	212.4	249.5	479.9	438.1	390.5	408.8	197.7	2393.4

Notes:

Includes all Permanent DARD staff

Figures are Full-time Equivalents

Excludes staff on Career Break

Flooding

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given the increase in flooding arising from designated watercourses, whether she will increase funding to address this problem.

(AQO 1374/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Rivers Agency focuses on 3 key areas to tackle flooding in areas of significant risk; these are Prevention, Protection and Preparedness. Firstly, the Agency aims to prevent damage from flooding by providing advice to the public and DOE Planning. This enables informed decisions to be taken which should avoid development in areas at risk from flooding. Secondly, the Agency provides protection to existing property at flood risk through the ongoing maintenance of existing drainage and flood defence systems and where viable the construction of new defences. Thirdly, my Rivers Agency prepares for flooding by working with key organisations to develop flood risk management plans and a co-ordinated response to flood events. The updated Flood Maps also provide information to the public who may be at risk because this understanding will enable them to be better prepared to react when a flood event occurs. I am convinced that by working together we can manage flood risk to reduce its impact on people, property and the environment.

Reducing flooding risk and minimising the damage caused by flooding will continue to be a priority issue for my Rivers Agency. I have made available an additional £1 million funding in 2012/13 to help with flood alleviation measures throughout the north of Ireland. I am pleased that the additional funding will enable the Ballygawley scheme to start construction this summer. With this additional funding Rivers Agency has updated its capital programme and as a result the Beragh scheme is scheduled to commence construction in the 2013/14 financial year. It is my intention, to seek out every opportunity to secure additional funding for flood risk management and if necessary, I will take this to the Executive.

Rural Crime

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what strategy her Department has in place to address the rising number of incidents of rural crime.

(AQO 1373/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am very aware of the increasing number of thefts on farms and recently met with both the Minister of Justice and the Chief Constable to highlight the increase in rural crime and the concern it is causing within the farming community. The Chief Constable has since written to notify me of a recent intelligence led investigation which led to the recovery of stolen items including a tractor, plant and tools. As a result of this investigation I understand that an individual is to appear at Court in the coming weeks charged with handling stolen goods. I welcome this investigation which the Chief Constable believes has disrupted an Organised Crime Gang and plan to arrange a follow-up meeting with the Chief Constable to further discuss how we can work together to tackle rural crime and how DARD Direct Offices can be used to disseminate information to rural dwellers.

I will continue to work closely with the Minister of Justice on raising awareness of rural crime and I welcome local initiatives brought forward by Community Safety Partnerships to prevent rural crime such as trailer marking and the forensic marking of sheep. I am encouraging farmers to participate in these initiatives and to continue to ensure that they secure their properties by taking steps to minimise the risk of theft from their farms.

I also plan to meet with Martin Callinan, the Commissioner of An Garda Síochána to discuss cross border rural crime, particularly the recent attacks on staff from the Loughs Agency of Foyle Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission (FCILC).

Production Diseases

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she is considering working with the farming industry on the control of production diseases such as Bovine Viral Diarrhoea.

(AQO 1380/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: At farm level, production diseases and conditions such as BVD, mastitis, lameness and Johne's Disease can have a significant impact on productivity and competitiveness.

I welcome the fact that there is an increasing desire within industry in the north of Ireland to tackle such diseases and to develop a preventative approach to animal health. As is the case in other regions where production diseases such as BVD are being tackled, there has to be a clear industry lead to make such animal health initiatives work.

My officials are already closely engaged with the BVD Working Group that industry here has established. My Department is also supporting an industry-led BVD research project through the Research Challenge Fund aimed at determining prevalence of the BVD virus in both suckler and dairy herds.

My officials are also considering what, if any, further assistance can be given to any industry-led initiatives to deal with such production diseases.

I am aware that a proposed new partnership strategic approach to tackling such diseases was discussed at a recent meeting of DARD's Animal Health and Welfare Stakeholder Forum, with the intention that this would build on the work industry is already doing on BVD. I look forward to hearing the outcome of these discussions. In the first instance an approach targeted at eradicating BVD would go a long way to demonstrate what can be achieved by industry for industry.

It is important to note that reducing costs in other areas, such as TB and brucellosis compensation, may help me make funding available which could be used to support initiatives here to deal with production diseases.

Rural Crime

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the action her Department is taking to address rural crime.

(AQO 1381/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am very aware of the increasing number of thefts on farms and recently met with both the Minister of Justice and the Chief Constable to highlight the increase in rural crime and the concern it is causing within the farming community. The Chief Constable has since written to notify me of a recent intelligence led investigation which led to the recovery of stolen items including a tractor, plant and tools. As a result of this investigation I understand that an individual is to appear at Court in the coming weeks charged with handling stolen goods. I welcome this investigation which the Chief Constable believes has disrupted an Organised Crime Gang and plan to arrange a follow-up meeting with the Chief Constable to further discuss how we can work together to tackle rural crime and how DARD Direct Offices can be used to disseminate information to rural dwellers.

I will continue to work closely with the Minister of Justice on raising awareness of rural crime and I welcome local initiatives brought forward by Community Safety Partnerships to prevent rural crime such as trailer marking and the forensic marking of sheep. I am encouraging farmers to participate in these initiatives and to continue to ensure that they secure their properties by taking steps to minimise the risk of theft from their farms.

I also plan to meet with Martin Callinan, the Commissioner of An Garda Síochána to discuss cross border rural crime, particularly the recent attacks on staff from the Loughs Agency of Foyle Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission (FCILC).

Strangford Lough: Pot Fishing

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why her department did not take the advice of the Department of the Environment, regarding the likely significance of pot fishing in Strangford Lough Special Area of Conservation, when completing the Article 6 assessment required by the EU Habitats Directive.

(AQO 1382/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: A test of likely significance under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive into pot fishing in Strangford lough was produced in 2011 by the Agri Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), not by my Department. AFBI record that the Northern Ireland Environment Agency of the Department of the Environment were consulted on the content of the document, and their responses are recorded on page 23 of the report. The AFBI assessment takes into account the information supplied by NIEA and reproduces significant parts thereof. The assessment makes full use of all sources of data available including 21 cited references independent of AFBI work. The assessment shows in figure 5 that the areas of pot fishery only overlaps marginally with areas identified as supporting *Modiolus* and provides 4 independent references to support the conclusion that pot fishing does not have a negative impact.

Common Agricultural Policy: EU Presidency

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the Irish Presidency of the European Union in 2013 in assisting the Common Agricultural Policy reform negotiations.

(AQO 1383/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: It is widely expected that the first half of 2013 will see a major push towards securing agreement on Common Agricultural Policy reform. Therefore, Ireland will be occupying the Presidency at a pivotal point in the negotiations and will play a key role in bringing the Commission, Member States and the Parliament to a point where agreement is possible. It is clear that the Commission will need to address the concerns so far expressed by the Council and the Parliament in response to its initial proposals. In the run-up to its Presidency, Ireland will have an increasingly influential role with the Commission and, therefore, given the similarities between the positions north and south, I will wish to work closely with the Minister Coveney.

Agri-food: Economic Recovery

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how she plans to develop the agri-food sector to help economic recovery.

(AQO 1384/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am grateful for this opportunity to restate my view about the important role that the agri-food sector will play in the development of the wider economy. The sector has performed strongly during the recent downturn and I believe is well placed to exploit export opportunities on a global stage and also in building economic recovery.

I am delighted that the importance of the sector has been recognised by the Executive. The draft Programme for Government includes a target to develop a strategic plan for the agri-food sector. In support of this, my Department is working with DETI/InvestNI to establish an Agri-Food Strategy Board (AFSB) whose role will be to develop and implement this strategic plan. We have recently appointed Tony O'Neill as the Chair and are currently in the process of recruiting members to the Board.

The AFSB will be industry-led as it is vital that the industry itself identifies and agrees its growth targets. Government will continue to play an important supporting role, with my Department continuing to work in close collaboration with Invest NI, DETI and DEL to deliver appropriate support functions. Ultimately, however, the growth of the sector can only be achieved by the industry itself.

The work of the AFSB will be instrumental in helping to shape the future of the sector. I look forward to the Board being established so that it can begin the important work of further developing a strategic vision to support growth and employment in this important sector.

Countryside Management Scheme: Tenancies

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether the new Countryside Management Scheme will permit the transfer of the tenancies of participating farms to new owners during the term of the Scheme.

(AQO 1385/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The new Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS) provides funding for owned and leased land to be managed under an agri-environment agreement. An NICMS participant may sell or lease land that is under agreement to a new landowner or tenant. If the new landowner or tenant has an existing relevant agri-environment agreement, they can add the new land to the agreement and continue managing that land to benefit the environment.

Where the new landowner or tenant does not have an existing agreement, and does not indicate a wish to apply to NICMS at the next application period, DARD will reclaim NICMS payments plus interest from the vendor.

Where the new landowner or tenant does not have an existing agreement, there are administrative difficulties in transferring existing agreements between owners for schemes that are now closed. I have asked my officials to consider how this may be facilitated in the future.

Fisheries: Selective Gears

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the progress made in identifying selective gears for the fishing fleet, in line with commitments given at the December 2011 EU Fisheries Council meeting.

(AQO 1386/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: A project has been approved to examine a range of selective fishing gears. The project is being led by the Sea Fish Industry Authority (Seafish) and a Steering Group, incorporating representatives from our 2 Producer Organisations, local net makers, AFBI scientists, and DARD policy officials has been established and had its first meeting in early January. The project, which my Department is co-funding through the European Fisheries Fund, has identified 5 different designs for highly selective gears for trialling.

An advertisement was placed in the Fishing News and a mail shot was issued to all local over 10 metre vessels, inviting applications for charter vessels to trial these selective gears in the Irish Sea. The closing date for receipt of applications was 10 February and the Steering Group will make a decision on selecting suitable vessels within the next couple of weeks.

The gear trials will take place over 15 to 20 days between March and April this year.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Bushmills Salmon Station

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what research projects are being undertaken at the Bushmills Research Station; and to outline the projected timescale of each project.

(AQW 7920/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): DCAL currently has commissioned four monitoring and research projects facilitated by Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) staff based at Bushmills Salmon Station.

Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) has commissioned one project facilitated by AFBI staff based at Bushmills Salmon Station.

Details of projects are outlined below:

Title of project	The marine survival of Atlantic salmon from the River Bush, Northern Ireland
Objective of research project	Investigate factors influencing the survival at sea of salmon smolts migrating from the River Bush until their return as adult salmon

Title of project	The marine survival of Atlantic salmon from the River Bush, Northern Ireland
Brief description of research project	This long-term project centres on enumerating numbers of migrating wild smolts and returning adults to the River Bush, by means of trapping facilities, in order to assess return rates and maturation schedules. A smolt microtagging programme provides age specific survival data and has contributed to the understanding of distribution, exploitation and survival in the marine environment. This data feeds into the annual National Report presented to the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) which in turn forms part of the ICES Working Group on North Atlantic Salmon (WGNAS) advice to North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation (NASCO).
Dates during which research will take place	Started in 1973. Project ongoing.

Title of project	The freshwater survival of Atlantic salmon on the River Bush, Northern Ireland
Objective of research project	Investigate and monitor factors influencing the survival in freshwater of juvenile salmon.
Brief description of research project	This long-term project involves the monitoring of freshwater phases of Atlantic salmon in the River Bush. Includes the evaluation of juvenile recruitment through electric fishing, the investigation of factors influencing juvenile production and the assessment of the efficacy of management actions.
Dates during which research will take place	Started in 1973. Project ongoing.

Title of project	Salmonid Management Strategy Monitoring Programme
Objective of research project	Development of conservation limits and monitoring programmes for the management of N Ireland's salmon stocks
Brief description of research project	The development of salmon conservation databases which are monitored on a range of rivers throughout the DCAL area.
Dates during which research will take place	AFBI took over this programme in 2007. Programme ongoing.

Title of project	Studies and Advice on Brown trout Management
Objective of research project	Development of scientific monitoring programmes for brown trout in the DCAL area.
Brief description of research project	The development of tools with which to monitor trout in a range of rivers throughout the DCAL area.
Dates during which research will take place	Jan 2011 on-going

Title of project	EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) fish classification
Objective of research project	To provide fish based WFD assessments on rivers throughout Northern Ireland.

Title of project	EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) fish classification
Brief description of research project	Under a service level agreement with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) collect and collate fish data in both rivers and lakes to assist with the EU Water Framework Directive classification of water bodies in the DCAL jurisdiction of N. Ireland.
Dates during which research will take place	The implementation of the Water Framework Directive does not have a completion date but the immediate aim is the production of the next River Basin Management Plan in 2015 which will be upgraded in 2021 and then again in 2027.

Football Association of Ireland: Ministerial Meeting

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she has met with, or plans to meet with, representatives of the Football Association of Ireland.

(AQW 7943/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I can confirm that to date I have not met with representatives of the Football Association of Ireland. At this time I do not have plans to meet with representatives of the Football Association of Ireland.

Hospitality: Spend

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what has been the total spend on hospitality by her Department in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8073/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In the financial years 2006-07 to 2010-11 inclusive, the Department's spending on hospitality was as follows:

2005-07	£32,493
2006-08	£41,117
2007-09	£64,452
2008-10	£44,930
2010-11	£37,027

Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises: DCAL Spend

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much her Department has spent on conferences, away-days and team building exercises in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8098/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In the financial years 2008-09 to 2010-11 inclusive, the Department's spending on conferences, away-days and team building exercises was as follows:

2007-10	£23,197
2008-11	£25,380
2010-11	£15,830

Doping: Sport

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline her Department's policy to combat doping in sport; and how much her Department has spent on addressing this issue in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8150/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) is in favour of combating doping in sport as it regards the practice of doping as contrary to the sporting values of equity, honesty and integrity enunciated in its strategy for sport, Sport Matters.

Primary responsibility for addressing the issue rests with sports governing bodies and athletes. However, over the last 5 financial years Sport NI, which is responsible for the development of sport and the distribution of funding, has spent £123,179.54 of exchequer monies in helping governing bodies and athletes combat doping. This spending, which has been used to support the appointment of an Anti-Doping Education Officer and related sports education programmes, may be broken down as follows:

Financial Year	Exchequer Funding
2007/08	0
2008/09	£27,215.45
2009/10	£36,811.39
2010/11	£30,621.61
2011/12	£28,531.13
Total	£123,179.54

Arts Council: Funding for the Braid Centre, Ballymena

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 6501/11-15, whether her Department can seek legal advice on an alleged breach of funding conditions.

(AQW 8175/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department can seek legal advice on an alleged breach of funding conditions if it considers it necessary.

Arts Council: Meeting with Ballymena Borough Council

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the recent meeting between the Arts Council and Ballymena Borough Council.

(AQW 8176/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Representatives from the Arts Council met with staff from Ballymena Council to discuss the display of flags and emblems at The Braid complex. The meeting followed concerns, raised recently by some elected members, that there was an issue for the Arts Council to address regarding the terms and conditions of a grant awarded to Ballymena Council in 1999.

The Arts Council has carried out a site visit and will report to its Board at the end of March. The Board will decide if any further action is required.

Flags and Emblems: Funding Conditions

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether the use of contentious flags and emblems by projects, which are funded by her Department on the premise of being open and accessible to the whole community, is a breach of funding conditions.

(AQW 8177/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Applicants for funding from my Department, and associated arms length bodies, are required to sign and adhere to equality and good relations clauses.

This requires successful organisations to comply with legislative regulations laid out in Equal Opportunities legislation; and that the activity/project funded will be open to all sections of the community.

Flags and Emblems: Arts Council Funding

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what are the equality implications of the use of flags and emblems by projects which receive lottery funding from the Arts Council.

(AQW 8178/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: All organisations applying for Arts Council funding are required to sign a Good Relations Commitment and to submit their Equal Opportunities Policy at the time of application. In addition all contracts require successful organisations to comply with legislative regulations laid out in Equal Opportunities legislation. The Arts Council has the right to claim back any grant payments if a grant recipient is proved to be in breach of its conditions of grant.

Flags and Emblems: Legal Advice

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what legal advice her Department and the Arts Council have received in relation to the use of flags and emblems in buildings that are to be a neutral and shared space and open to all.

(AQW 8179/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: No legal advice has been sought on this issue.

Enniskillen Library: Refurbishment

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the refurbishment of Enniskillen Library.

(AQW 8284/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Libraries NI's proposed refurbishment of Enniskillen library is currently 'on hold' as a capital funding bid for the project was not met in the Budget 2010 process.

I am disappointed not to have the money to invest in this project, at this time. The project remains a priority for Libraries NI if future funding becomes available.

Salmon Species: Catch and Release

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether the proposed mandatory catch and release of salmon species by rod and line anglers will be required on the departmental Angling Estate.

(AQW 8395/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The catch and release only of salmon by rod and line anglers will be introduced to Public Angling Estate waters for the 2012 season to protect and conserve the declining salmon stocks present in those waters.

Salmon Species: Catch and Release

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when the proposed mandatory catch and release of salmon species by rod and line anglers on the departmental Angling Estate will commence and how long it will remain in force.

(AQW 8396/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Current legislation requires that anglers must practice catch and release of salmon by rod and line across the DCAL jurisdiction from the start of the game fishing season on 1 March until 31 May.

As fishery owner the Department will introduce catch and release only for salmon on all Public Angling Estate waters with effect from 1 June 2012. This will remain in force until the end of the game fishing season on 31 October.

Salmon Species: Catch and Release

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether angling clubs, which lease departmental-owned waters, will be required to comply with the proposed mandatory catch and release of salmon species by rod and line anglers.

(AQW 8397/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Angling clubs, which lease waters for which the Department owns the fishing rights, will be required to comply with catch and release only for salmon by rod and line anglers for the 2012 season.

Salmon Species: Catch and Release

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, under what legal authority she is going to issue instructions in relation to the proposed mandatory catch and release of salmon species by rod and line anglers on the departmental Angling Estate.

(AQW 8398/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: DCAL as owner or lessee of the fishing rights for waters which make up the Public Angling Estate has the authority as fishery owner to introduce conditions and restrictions on angling at these waters.

Salmon Species: Catch and Release

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in relation to the proposed mandatory catch and release of salmon species by rod and line anglers on the departmental Angling Estate, to detail (i) who advised her Department of these changes; (ii) what measures will be put in place to ensure that the wider angling community is aware of the changes before the start of the fishing season; and (iii) whether she will make a statement, to the Assembly and the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, on this matter.

(AQW 8399/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín:

- (i) DCAL technical staff and officials have advised the Department on the need to introduce catch and release only for salmon in the DCAL Public Angling Estate, based on the consideration of local and international scientific research and monitoring.
- (ii) The Department has issued a press release on this matter and has written to angling clubs that manage or lease waters for which DCAL owns the fishing rights. Anglers will also be informed through the NI Direct angling website and leaflets will be provided for Permit and Licence distributors to give to anglers when they purchase these documents.
- (iii) It is not envisaged at this stage that I will make a statement on mandatory catch and release on DCAL owned waters to the Assembly or the Committee for Culture Arts and Leisure.

Museums: Accessibility

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans she has to make the collections of National Museums Northern Ireland more accessible to local people.

(AQO 1341/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: While this matter is operationally the responsibility of National Museums it is also a priority for me.

The Museums Policy was launched by my Department in March 2011. The Policy includes a strategic priority around the Development, Care, Management and Use of collections.

Officials from National Museums, the Museums Council and DCAL are working closely to ensure the successful implementation of the Policy.

Officials from all 3 organisations discussed implementation with the CAL Committee on 9 February 2012.

I have asked National Museums and the Museums Council to clearly set out how they intend to implement the Museums Policy in their Corporate and Business Plans for 2012/2013.

Arm's-length Bodies: Budget Allocation

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what proportion of her Department's annual budget is allocated to arm's-length bodies.

(AQO 1331/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Of the 2011/12 total opening allocation of my department of £128.39m, 84% has been allocated to Arms length bodies.

This is based on the following 2011/12 opening allocations to ALBs:

	Resource £m	Capital £m	Total £m
Arts Council	15.20	3.83	19.03
National Museums NI	17.68	0.25	17.93
Libraries NI	31.56	2.30	33.86
Sports Council	11.49	11.75	23.24
AOP	1.83	0.00	1.83
NI Screen	1.26	0.00	1.26
NI Museums Council	0.27	0.00	0.27
N/S Languages*	6.47	0.00	6.47
Waterways Ireland	3.75	0.00	3.75
World Police & Fire Games	1.14	0.00	1.14
Total	90.65	18.13	108.78

Líofa 2015

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she has any plans to set a new target for the Líofa 2015 initiative, given that the original target of 1000 has already been met.

(AQO 1332/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Since I launched Líofa in September, I have been pleased at the support it has received across the north of Ireland. We have already surpassed our target of 1,000 people signing up to be fluent, and are now aiming for 2,015 by 2015.

Questions for Written Answer: Stationery Costs

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much the paper and envelopes used in providing answers to Assembly Written Questions cost per item, per box or per hundred units. **(AQW 8520/11-15)**

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department does not routinely estimate the cost of answering Assembly Questions and so the information requested is not available.

Decade of Centenaries

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how she will demonstrate that the suite of commemorations and events that she is bringing forward will be inclusive. **(AQO 1342/11-15)**

Ms Ní Chuilín: Centenaries and significant anniversaries during the decade ahead provide all of us on this island with the opportunity to gain a greater understanding of our shared past and how it shapes Irish and British identities and relationships today.

The key issue is not whether these events are remembered but how they are remembered. I am supportive of an inclusive, non-triumphalist and strategic approach to commemorations. I endorse the principles developed by the Community Relations Council and Heritage Lottery Fund to remember the past in the context of an inclusive and accepting society.

The arts and cultural sectors can provide innovative ways to remember the past. Arm-length bodies supported by my Department can help to tell the stories behind the decade of centenaries and other significant anniversaries. The Community Festivals Fund can also now be used by local councils to support an inclusive approach to remembering the past.

A recent event at St Mary's University College on the Falls Road marked the centenary of a speech by Winston Churchill in the grounds of Belfast Celtic Football Club. A drama production brought that speech back to life and demonstrated the role the arts can play in telling the stories and different perspectives of that period.

Fishing: Lough Neagh

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many illegal nets have been seized in Lough Neagh in the past three months. **(AQO 1337/11-15)**

Ms Ní Chuilín: In the three months from 1 November 2011 to 31 January 2012 20 nets totalling 14,000 yards have been seized from Lough Neagh by DCAL Fisheries Protection Officers.

Museums: Inventory of Artefacts

Mr F McCann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether there is a complete and accurate inventory of artefacts held by Museums NI. **(AQO 1339/11-15)**

Ms Ní Chuilín: Historically the artefacts held by National Museums were documented by various people with differing and disparate methods and standards.

In 2007, National Museums initiated a programme to ensure that all of its artefacts are on a computerised inventory through the Comprehensive Documentation Plan 2007-14.

To date National Museums has a complete and accurate computerised inventory for 74% of its collections. It aims to have a complete inventory by 2014.

Kennedy Kane McArthur

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on her Department's plans to celebrate the centenary of Kennedy Kane McArthur's Olympic Marathon victory.

(AQO 1343/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Firstly I would like to acknowledge the work of one of Kennedy Kane McArthur's greatest supporters, Mr Mervyn Storey. The elected member for the area has been tremendously successful in both raising the profile of this issue and supporting the many local groups that wish to mark the centenary of this local man's Olympic success.

I am particularly pleased that, through the advice and support of my Department, Ballymoney District Council and the Dervock and District Community Association (DDCA) has been awarded the prestigious London 2012 Inspire mark for their centenary celebrations this year. They have also secured a visit from the Olympic Torch on Sunday 3 June. My officials will continue to provide guidance and advice as appropriate to help the council and the DDCA maximise their plans and their association with the 2012 Games.

Department of Education

Primary School: Compulsory Starting Age

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education what plans he has to address the issue of children starting primary school before the compulsory starting age of four.

(AQW 7395/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): As indicated in my announcement on the Review of Pre-School Admission Arrangements on 17 January 2012, the Department will seek to bring forward legislation at the earliest opportunity to prevent schools from offering reception provision as it is not educationally desirable and can cause operational difficulties.

It is recognised, however, that this will require a plan and resources to replace this provision with suitable alternative pre-school places over the next few years.

Pupils: Speech, Language and Communication Difficulties

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education, in each of the last five years, (i) how many children in P1 have had speech, language and communication difficulties, broken down by council area; and (ii) how these figures compare with other regions of the UK.

(AQW 7883/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested in part (i) is detailed in the table below and is based on the number of pupils recorded by schools as having speech and language difficulties, in line with Departmental guidance.

- (ii) It is not possible to make direct comparisons with other regions of the UK, as there are differences in compulsory school starting age and in the recording of pupils with special educational needs.

YEAR 1 PUPILS RECORDED AS HAVING SPEECH AND LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES, BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT DISTRICT OF PUPIL RESIDENCE, 2007/08 – 2011/12

Local Government District	2007/ 08	2008/ 09	2009/ 10	2010/ 11	2011/ 12
Postcode not provided/ unknown/not recognised	44	19	22	5	8

Local Government District	2007/ 08	2008/ 09	2009/ 10	2010/ 11	2011/ 12
Antrim	20	16	26	28	20
Ards	16	18	16	19	17
Armagh	18	20	25	17	13
Ballymena	17	11	11	12	9
Ballymoney	10	*	10	5	17
Banbridge	10	9	18	9	22
Belfast	156	125	135	123	139
Carrickfergus	6	#	8	7	7
Castlereagh	12	13	13	27	14
Coleraine	8	10	10	19	18
Cookstown	14	8	13	10	13
Craigavon	39	45	38	35	50
Derry	62	59	40	51	73
Down	15	27	35	49	29
Dungannon	19	16	32	19	24
Fermanagh	24	19	26	30	31
Larne	#	15	10	9	8
Limavady	13	20	16	12	#
Lisburn	72	82	76	71	82
Magherafelt	10	9	18	20	18
Moyle	*	0	6	5	*
Newry & Mourne	30	32	22	30	44
Newtownabbey	20	24	15	21	20
North Down	24	16	18	39	12
Omagh	19	24	30	26	29
Strabane	13	20	7	21	23
Total	700	665	696	719	751

Source: NI school census

Note:

- 1 Figures relate to pupils in primary and special schools.
- 2 It is a possibility that some pupils at SEN stages 1 and 2 with these conditions may have been recorded under a more generic 'Communication and Interaction difficulties' classification and not therefore included in the totals presented in this table.

'*' denotes fewer than 5 cases.

'#' means a figure ≥ 5 has been treated to prevent disclosure of a small number elsewhere.

Woodlands Language Unit, Derry

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Education to detail the rationale for the proposed closure of the Woodlands Language Unit, Derry.

(AQW 7910/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Woodlands Language Unit provides speech and language support for children, who do not have statements of Special Educational Need (SEN), and who are enrolled in mainstream primary schools. Its location, within the grounds of Belmont House Special School, is considered unsuitable by the Western Education and Library Board as the current approach for children who need such support is to provide it at mainstream primary schools.

The Western Board has, therefore, been in discussion over the past two years with the Board of Governors of Belmont House Special School about the relocation of the 4 speech and language classes to mainstream primary school locations in both the controlled and maintained sectors.

The Western Board intends to publish a supporting statutory Development Proposal, which will afford anyone with an interest an opportunity to comment directly to the Department. However, at this stage, the issues involved are a matter for the Board to consider.

I understand that this issue has been the subject of public comment and concern and I am assured that the WELB will be writing to parents to clarify the position.

Woodlands Language Unit, Derry: Closure

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Education when, and to which language centre, the children who currently attend Woodlands Language Unit, Derry, will be relocated.

(AQW 7914/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Woodlands Language Unit provides speech and language support for children, who do not have statements of Special Educational Need (SEN), and who are enrolled in mainstream primary schools. Its location, within the grounds of Belmont House Special School, is considered unsuitable by the Western Education and Library Board as the current approach for children who need such support is to provide it at mainstream primary schools.

The Western Board has, therefore, been in discussion over the past two years with the Board of Governors of Belmont House Special School about the relocation of the 4 speech and language classes to mainstream primary school locations in both the controlled and maintained sectors.

The Western Board intends to publish a supporting statutory Development Proposal, which will afford anyone with an interest an opportunity to comment directly to the Department. However, at this stage, the issues involved are a matter for the Board to consider.

I understand that this issue has been the subject of public comment and concern and I am assured that the WELB will be writing to parents to clarify the position.

Statement of Special Educational Needs: Support

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education (i) whether he is aware of the concern amongst parents in relation to the planned changes to the statementing system in schools; and (ii) whether the introduction of the co-ordinated support plans might reduce the amount of support which children holding a Statement of Special Educational Needs currently receive.

(AQW 7929/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In response to i) I am acutely aware of the anxiety that has recently been generated among parents of special needs children, which followed the publication of the Summary Report of Responses to the Consultation on The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion. I have made it very clear publicly my concerns about the claim that statements were to be scrapped with the implication that the necessary help for vulnerable pupils would not be provided. I have made

no proposals to remove statutory support from special needs pupils with the greatest level of need. I indicated in my foreword to the summary report that I have asked that officials to engage with parents, schools and other key stakeholders on my proposals, so that I can make final decisions about how these can be taken forward. This engagement is already underway.

In relation to ii) I am proposing that co-ordinated support plans (CSPs) would be introduced for those special needs children with complex and /or multiple needs and that those plans would have broadly the same statutory basis as currently exists for statements. I am not proposing to reduce the necessary support for any child with special educational needs. I do want the system to be more responsive, less bureaucratic and able to provide supports for children in a more timely and straightforward manner. I also want to see a focus, through CSPs, on the outcomes expected for children in order for them to achieve the best educational outcomes possible.

Teachers: Recruitment when Newly Qualified

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to detail the proportion of newly qualified teachers who have obtained a full-time permanent teaching post in each of the last three years.

(AQW 7950/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I refer you to your question AQW 777/11-15 which was published in official report on 24 June 2011.

Teachers: Recruitment when Newly Qualified

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education how many newly qualified teachers have found (i) permanent teaching posts; (ii) temporary teaching posts, including maternity cover and one year posts, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 7955/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of newly qualified teachers who have found permanent or temporary teaching posts in each of the last five years is detailed in the following table:

Graduated in Financial Year	All NI Grads (1)	Total NI Grad's Reg'd with GTCNI	Proportion of teachers & capacity of first employment in each Academic year (2)																						
			2006/2007			2007/2008			2008/2009			2009/2010			2010/2011										
			Perm		Temp	Perm		Temp	Perm		Temp	Perm		Temp	Perm		Temp								
			No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%							
2006/2007	807	708		107	13.3	246	30.5	140	17.3	24	3.0	99	12.3	7	0.9	61	7.6	4	0.5	37	4.6	3	0.4		
2007/2008	805	712					118	14.7	256	31.8	126	15.7	20	2.5	71	8.8	6	0.7	51	6.3	6	0.7			
2008/2009	735	646									118	16.1	310	42.2	80	10.9	20	2.7	59	8.0	17	2.3			
2009/2010	691	578													90	13.0	344	49.8	77	11.1	37	5.4			
2010/2011	678	584																		54	8.0	442	65.2		

Notes:

- 1 Not all the NI graduates in each year will have registered with the GTCNI in order to be able to teach in a grant-aided school here, as they may wish to teach elsewhere or to pursue a different career path. The graduate list can also vary slightly year on year due to late notifications by the universities.
- 2 Figures do not include Voluntary Grammar Schools as the Department does not hold their payroll information.
- 3 Permanent teaching posts include permanent full-time, permanent part-time (pro rata) and one year contracts. Temporary teaching posts include teachers employed on a casual hourly or daily basis.

Efficiency Savings

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what level of efficiency savings are planned in (i) departmental administration; (ii) Curriculum Advisory and Support Services; and (iii) the Regional Training Unit, over the next three years.

(AQW 8001/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The planned savings to be delivered over the next three years for departmental administration are £3.2m / £3.7m / £4.2m and £30m / £30m / £30m for Professional Support for Schools, including Curriculum Advisory Support Service (CASS), Regional Training Unit (RTU) and other priority earmarked funding for core policy initiatives. The savings required by the Department to manage its budget over the Budget 2011-15 period are outlined in the Departmental Savings Delivery Plan which is published on the Department's website at: www.deni.gov.uk/budget_2011-15_savings_delivery_plan_revised.pdf

Schools: Departmental Communication

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what plans his Department has to improve communications with schools, so that schools can be kept informed of policy announcements that are made in the media.

(AQW 8005/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department uses a range of methods to communicate directly with schools. Traditional forms of communication include the use of the "DEMail" e-mail account which is used to communicate policy updates, circulars, and urgent correspondence to schools and Boards of Governors. My Department also sits on the steering group of 'Linked', a magazine aimed at communicating major policy issues directly to teachers.

My Department is currently expanding its use of new media. The Department's website is currently undergoing a review with a view to a new site being launched later in the year. Increasing use is also being made of Twitter and YouTube, whilst the launch of Every School a Good School television (ESaGS.tv) last month is designed to support schools in raising standards through the sharing of best practice. I have also recorded video messages for staff across the education sector for distribution after major policy announcements. The use of new media enables my Department to reach schools, teachers, parents and young people directly, quickly and effectively and will be a key focus for communications in the future.

Bunscoil Cholmcille, Derry: Funding Applications

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Education for an update on the funding applications made by Bunscoil Cholmcille in Derry, including whether these applications are still under consideration; and how much capital funding is currently available for the Irish medium sector.

(AQW 8021/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In November 2010 Bunscoil Cholmcille received minor works funding amounting to £15,330 for special needs adaptations. A request for a storage container was also approved in November 2011 at a cost of £6,500. However the contractor who was awarded the contract ceased trading and the work has had to be retendered.

Following a number of recent incidents of vandalism at the school, the WELB Security/Health and Safety officer has carried out an assessment of the premises and has made a number of recommendations and work to improve security at the school will be considered for inclusion in the 2012/13 programme of minor capital works.

All applications for minor capital works in grant maintained schools are considered against expressed funding priorities for the delivery of minor capital works and as such no specific minor works budget is allocated to the Irish medium education sector

Schools: Efficiency Savings

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education whether he can offer an assurance that any future pay rises, or increases in National Insurance contributions, will be met by departmental funding rather than by efficiency savings in schools.

(AQW 8067/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In agreeing Budget 2011-15 allocations, my predecessor made provision for increases in the pay bill (including pay awards and national insurance increases) across the 4 year period based on pay assumptions available at that time.

The impact on the budgetary position of any future deviations from those original assumptions can only be assessed at that time.

Primary School Admissions: Lagan Valley

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of first preference applications for each primary school in the Lagan Valley area for the 2012/13 academic year; and the enrolment capacity of each school. [R]

(AQW 8120/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The admissions process for places in primary schools in the 2012/13 academic year is currently ongoing. The South-Eastern and Southern Education and Library Boards, which administer the admissions process for areas within the Lagan Valley constituency, will not be in a position to provide the information requested until after the process is completed on 18 April 2012, when letters issue to parents advising them of the primary school for which their child has been accepted/not accepted. I will be pleased to provide the information to you after that date if that would be helpful.

Preschool Admissions: Lagan Valley

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of first preference applications for each pre-school provider in the Lagan Valley area for the 2012/13 academic year; and the enrolment capacity of each pre-school.[R]

(AQW 8121/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The admissions process for places in pre-school education in the 2012/13 academic year is currently ongoing. The South-Eastern and Southern Education and Library Boards, which administer the admissions process for areas within the Lagan Valley constituency, will not be in a position to provide the information requested until after the process is completed on 1 June 2012, when final placement letters issue to parents. I will be pleased to provide the information to you after that date if that would be helpful.

Schools: Closure Criteria

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to detail the criteria used to determine a school closure.
(AQW 8172/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Any significant change to the schools' estate, such as a school closure, would require the publication of a statutory Development Proposal to support that intent. This must be preceded by consultation and once published, there is a further statutory 2-month period during which anyone who wishes to do so can forward their comments to the Department.

Each case will be considered on its individual circumstances taking account of all the pertinent issues and the comments received both for and against the proposal. Above all, the provision of a quality education must be the overriding consideration and the criteria set out in the Sustainable Schools Policy criteria must therefore be taken into account:

- Quality Educational Experience
- Sound Financial Position
- Stable Enrolment Trends
- Strong Leadership and Management

■ Accessibility

■ Strong Links with the Community

Schools: Newbuilds in Portadown/Lurgan

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education for an update on the new builds for (i) St Michael's Grammar School, Lurgan; (ii) Tannaghmore Primary School, Lurgan; (iii) St Teresa's Primary School, Lurgan; and (iv) Portadown College, Portadown.

(AQW 8185/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As I set out in my Statement to the Assembly on Monday 26 September 2011, I have commissioned the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs) working in close conjunction with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and other sectors to co-ordinate a strategic area planning exercise based on each ELB area to shape the future pattern of education delivery.

I have asked for area plans to be completed by the end of March 2012 for post-primary schools and June 2012 for primary schools.

Previously identified projects will be critically assessed alongside all other potential projects as part of the area planning process to determine how they will contribute to the overall infrastructure needed and may re-emerge if identified as a priority to support the area plan. No school building project will be looked at in isolation but must be considered in the context of the wider area.

Gaeltacht/Irish-medium Schools: Cross-border Collaborative Programme

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost to his Department of the cross-border collaborative programme for the 2011/12 academic year to support Gaeltacht schools and Irish-medium schools; and the number of teachers involved.

(AQW 8203/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: A collaborative programme of work for the initial, early and continuing professional development of teachers in the Irish Medium Education sectors North and South, which has been developed by the North South Teacher Qualifications Working Group, is currently being implemented.

The Department has provided funding of £22,000 in the current financial year to meet the costs of participation by teachers from the North in the programme, and by the end of March 2012 it is anticipated that approximately 72 teachers will have participated North and South. The Department of Education and Skills in the South is meeting the costs of participation of teachers from the South.

A small amount of funding would be required to complete residual elements of the programme in the period April to June 2012.

Educational Underachievement Working Group

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education for an update on the work of the Educational Underachievement Working Group.

(AQW 8243/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The focus of the Joint North South Educational Underachievement Working Group's (the Group) work is on sharing of best practice in tackling underachievement in literacy and numeracy and integrating work on addressing barriers to learning that may adversely affect pupils' attendance and achievement at school. The Group last met in October 2011.

Through the work of the Group, both DE and DES provided funding to support Maths Week Ireland 2011, held in October 2011. I was pleased to launch this event in the north of Ireland which is aimed at raising awareness and promoting positive attitudes towards maths among children and parents.

We also want to learn from best practice internationally. The two Departments supported a recent peer learning event bringing together educationalists from across Europe to explore policies aimed at identifying and tackling underachievement.

The Group is also working to promote literacy skills amongst our young people and is considering the possibility of commissioning further joint Inspectorate reports on best practice in literacy and numeracy. In addition, officials from DE and the National Educational Welfare Board are considering the way forward on the sharing of best practice on attendance and retention.

I am committed to tackling underachievement and promoting the raising of standards for all our young people especially in the skills of literacy and numeracy that are so vital to our economic development. There is much good practice we can share and the Group continues to play an important role in taking this work forward.

Antenatal Appointments

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education whether his Department has a policy in relation to allowing employees to attend antenatal appointments during working hours.

(AQW 8261/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: All NICS HR policies are contained in the NICS HR Handbook. The Handbook makes provision for NICS staff who are pregnant and who have, on medical advice, made an appointment to receive antenatal care, to be given time off to keep the appointment. Except for the first appointment, an employee may be asked to produce a certificate of pregnancy and proof that the appointment has been made.

Academic Selection

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many grammar schools currently set their own academic selection tests.

(AQW 8282/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department does not collect information on the use of unregulated tests by grammar schools.

Statement of Special Educational Needs: Mainstream Schools

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Education how many children with a Statement of Special Educational Needs have attended mainstream schools in each of the last three years, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 8286/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

STATEMENTED CHILDREN IN MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS BY CONSTITUENCY 2009/10 - 2011/12

Constituency	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Not known	182	173	122
Belfast East	346	381	424
Belfast North	415	430	460
Belfast South	319	360	401
Belfast West	564	578	601
East Antrim	246	253	257
East Derry	528	536	530
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	600	631	682
Foyle	553	588	566

Constituency	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Lagan Valley	489	504	515
Mid Ulster	586	607	599
Newry And Armagh	917	930	937
North Antrim	406	413	431
North Down	283	285	280
South Antrim	341	347	368
South Down	905	924	894
Strangford	442	445	441
Upper Bann	845	837	822
West Tyrone	426	440	475
Total	9,393	9,662	9,805

Source: NI school census.

Note:

- 1 Figures relate to pupils in nursery, primary and post-primary schools.
- 2 Figures for pupils at primary and post-primary schools relate to pupil residence, where known. Figures for pupils at nursery schools relate to school location.
- 3 Figures relate to pupils in special units and mainstream classes.
- 4 Statemented pupils are at Stage 5 on the Special Education Needs Code of Practice. Speech and Language Therapists

Speech and Language Therapists: WELB

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Education how many speech and language therapists in the Western Education and Library Board area are members of the Language and Communications Team.
(AQW 8289/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Western Education and Library Board has advised that none of the speech and language therapists working in the area are members of the board's Language and Communications Team.

Education and Skills Authority: Resignation of Chairperson

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education to detail the process which led to the granting of a redundancy package for the Chairperson to the Board of the Education and Skills Authority.
(AQW 8295/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Chairperson designate of the Education and Skills Authority informed me on 5 January of his decision to resign from this position with effect from 31 January 2012. I have accepted his resignation. The Chairperson has not been made redundant; this is a Ministerial public appointment and no redundancy package has been granted.

Ballymoney High School: Capital Works

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, in light of the Court of Appeal's judgement on Loretto Grammar School, Omagh, to detail the implications for capital works at Ballymoney High School which have been announced, but have not yet commenced.
(AQW 8296/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I would refer the Member to my answer to his earlier question AQW 6920/11-15 which was published in the Official Report on 10 February 2012.

The Appeal Court ruling stated that the Loreto Grammar School could not assume a substantive legitimate expectation based on the Ministerial announcement made in 2004. It concluded that capital planning announcements are not without qualification as all necessary approvals need to be in place and finance must be available before a project gets the necessary final approval.

As I have previously stated, the Department's legal advice is that the ruling applies to all projects previously announced but which have not yet commenced, including that for Ballymoney High School,.

As you will be aware the policy and financial context within which we are currently operating has changed considerably. Any future capital projects coming forward will therefore be looked at in the context of Area Planning and no project will be considered in isolation.

Pupils: Cross-border Attendance

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what work his Department is undertaking in relation to a legislative change regarding children from the Republic of Ireland being educated in Northern Ireland. **(AQW 8297/11-15)**

Mr O'Dowd: Legislation currently requires that schools and pre-schools give priority in admission to those who are resident in the north over those who are not resident. Legislation also permits assistance with home-to-school transport only for journeys to schools in the north. I believe this legislation should change to reflect and facilitate the reality of the lives led by people who live in border areas and the way in which they access public services.

Work in this regard consists of ongoing investigation to understand the nature of our current legislation in the context of EU mobility laws. Alongside this, joint work is being undertaken by my Department and the Department of Education and Skills that will help us understand the implications of introducing a new legislative position. At the NSMC Education Meeting of September 21, 2012, I agreed with the Minister for Education and Skills that the two Education Departments should jointly design and conduct a survey to establish the current and future schooling capacity and need in border regions and the level of demand from parents and young people for the option to choose a school across the border. Officials from the two departments have been jointly developing the nature and detail of this agreed survey – which aims to report for the first NSMC meeting of 2013. One of the survey's aims, as agreed at the 1 February, 2012 NSMC Education Meeting, is that it should support estimates of costs and numbers in relation to the potential cross-border school attendance if current obstacles (including our current admissions and transport legislation) were removed.

Pupils: Republic of Ireland Admissions

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of children from the Republic of Ireland who are being educated in Northern Ireland. **(AQW 8298/11-15)**

Mr O'Dowd: According to figures recorded in the school census, there are 406 pupils from the Republic of Ireland attending schools in the North in 2011/12. This includes 44 pupils who are boarders.

Pupils: Republic of Ireland Admissions

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of children from Northern Ireland who are being educated in the Republic of Ireland. **(AQW 8299/11-15)**

Mr O'Dowd: This information is not held by my Department.

Educational Attainment: Children and Young People with Disabilities

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the quantitative and qualitative data available on the educational attainment of children and young people with disabilities.

(AQW 8380/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Quantitative data are taken from the school leavers survey (SLS) which details the qualifications and destinations of all pupils leaving mainstream grant aided schools. Pupils with special educational needs have been used in this instance as an indication of disability. The table below shows the performance of school leavers with a special educational need attending mainstream grant aided schools.

PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOL LEAVERS ACHIEVING GCSEs AND A LEVELS BY SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEED STAGE 2009/10

	No SEN	SEN Stages 1-4	SEN Stage 5	NI Average
3 + A Levels A*-E	57.2	21.2	8.5	50.8
2 + A Levels A*-E	59.4	22.7	9.7	53.0
At least 5 GCSEs A*-C inc. equivalents	79.1	38.3	21.0	71.9
At least 5 GCSEs A*-C (inc. equivalents) including GCSE English and maths	66.1	25.3	13.4	59.0
No GCSEs	1.0	6.0	13.1	2.1

Data excludes special and independent schools

Source: School Leavers Survey

These data show that seventy nine percent of all school leavers without a special educational need (SEN) achieved at least 5 GCSEs A*-C (inc. equivalents) in 2009/10. For school leavers with a statement of special educational needs, twenty one per cent attained this standard. One percent of all school leavers without a special educational need did not achieve any GCSEs compared with thirteen percent of school leavers with a statement of special educational needs.

In addition, in 2009/10 less than five school leavers attending special schools achieved at least five GCSEs A*-C (inc. equivalents). Eighty one percent left special schools without any GCSEs.

In terms of qualitative data, the school improvement policy makes clear that schools are responsible for their own improvement, through the process of self-evaluation and action planning for improvement. Alongside self-evaluation by schools, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) provides an external, professional assessment of provision in our schools. The ETI comments on a school's leadership and management; the standards achieved by all the pupils in the school; and the quality of teaching and learning, including provision made to support pupils with additional or special educational needs (SEN). In evaluating the quality of provision and in particular standards achieved by those pupils who have SEN, ETI will take into account also any accredited courses which are below GCSE level (e.g. Level One or Entry level) but which will allow for appropriate progression routes for each individual pupil according to their needs.

School inspection is a key part of the school improvement process through which we can identify the schools most in need of support and take action to ensure the quality of education provided is at least satisfactory. We can also identify schools with outstanding and very good provision and take steps to disseminate their good practice across all schools.

Post-primary Schools: South Down

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Education, for each post-primary school in the South Down area, to detail (i) the enrolment number; (ii) the enrolment capacity; (iii) the current financial situation at the school; (iv) the percentage of pupils who gained five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C in the 2010/11 academic year; and (v) the percentage of pupils (a) with special educational needs; and (b) in receipt of free school meals.

(AQW 8388/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the tables below.

TABLE 1 - ENROLMENTS INFORMATION ON POST PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE SOUTH DOWN CONSTITUENCY – 2011/12

School name	Enrolment Number ¹ (i)	Enrolment Capacity ² (ii)	% pupils with SEN ³	% pupils entitled to free school meals
Abbey Christian Brothers Grammar School	894	850	4.3	9.5
Blackwater Integrated College	310	400	51.3	19.4
De La Salle High School	358	430	20.7	33.5
Down High School	950	934	3.4	3.7
Kilkeel High School	696	830	12.9	10.8
Rathfriland High School	296	330	16.6	16.6
Sacred Heart Grammar School	845	875	1.0	9.4
Shimna Integrated College	532	480	23.5	16.0
St Colmcille's High School, Crossgar	396	450	25.0	19.2
St Columban's College, Kilkeel	230	550	21.3	29.6
St Louis Grammar School, Kilkeel	585	570	3.6	12.1
St Malachy's High School, Castlewellan	1,037	950	16.3	29.3
St Mark's High School, Warrenpoint	897	850	32.1	27.5
St Mary's High School, Downpartick	425	600	20.5	29.9
St Patrick's Grammar School, Downpatrick	689	665	10.6	6.2

Source: NI school census for actual enrolments. DE School Access Team for approved enrolment capacity figures.

Note:

- 1 The Enrolment Number has been interpreted to be the actual number of pupils on the school roll as at the October 2011 school census and includes children in receipt of a statement of special educational needs, admitted on appeal or by direction of the Exceptional Circumstances Body. These pupils are supernumerary to a school's approved enrolment capacity.
- 2 Enrolment Capacity has been interpreted to be the approved enrolment number for the 2011/12 school year and does not include any temporary variation to that number which may have been granted by the Department.
- 3 Figures for % SEN pupils relate to pupils at Stage 1 – 5 on the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice.

TABLE 2 - PERFORMANCE INFORMATION ON POST PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE SOUTH DOWN CONSTITUENCY – 2010/11

School Name	Percentage of Year 12 pupils achieving 5 or more GCSEs (inc equivalent qualifications) at grades A*-C
Abbey Christian Brothers Grammar School	100.0
Blackwater Integrated College	52.5
De La Salle High School	71.1
Down High School	97.1
Kilkeel High School	76.6
Rathfriland High School	76.1
Sacred Heart Grammar School	98.4
Shimna Integrated College	70.4
St Colmcille's High School, Crossgar	68.8
St Columban's College, Kilkeel	43.8
St Louis Grammar School, Kilkeel	100.0
St Malachy's High School, Castlewellan	59.2
St Mark's High School, Warrenpoint	74.4
St Mary's High School, Downpatrick	67.2
St Patrick's Grammar School, Downpatrick	97.9

Source: Summary of Annual Examination Results.

TABLE 3 - FINANCIAL INFORMATION - EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD POST PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE SOUTH DOWN CONSTITUENCY

School name	Cumulative surplus/ deficit at March 2011⁽¹⁾ £	Cumulative surplus/ deficit as a % of available Delegated Budget
De La Salle High School	273,052	14.12%
Down High School	178,647	4.50%
Kilkeel High School	-114,208	-3.83%
Rathfriland High School	169,308	11.38%
St Colmcille's High School, Crossgar	-63,668	-3.26%
St Columban's College, Kilkeel	-36,375	-3.14%
St Malachy's High School, Castlewellan	244,598	5.22%
St Mark's High School, Warrenpoint	-157,499	-4.40%
St Mary's High School, Downpartick	90,981	4.12%

TABLE 4 - FINANCIAL DATA - VOLUNTARY GRAMMAR/GRANT-MAINTAINED INTEGRATED POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS(2) & (3) SOUTH DOWN CONSTITUENCY

School name	Comment on Financial Position ⁽⁴⁾
Abbey Christian Brothers Grammar School	The reported financial position of these schools includes an element of non-public funds which means that it cannot be compared on a like for like basis with each other or with ELB schools. The Department of Education can confirm that there are no VG/GMI schools with a deficit of public funds at March 2011
Blackwater Integrated College	
Sacred Heart Grammar School	
Shimna Integrated College	
St Louis Grammar School, Kilkeel	
St Patrick's Grammar School, Downpatrick	

Notes:

- 1 2010/11 is the latest Financial year for which financial data is available.
- 2 DE is Funding Authority for these Sectors
- 3 These schools are not reported on in the same way as schools for which ELBs are Funding Authority.

Education and Skills Authority: Chief Executive

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education when, and how, the post of Chief Executive (Designate) of the Education and Skills Authority was advertised and filled.

(AQW 8439/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The recruitment advertisement for the post of Chief Executive (Designate) of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) was published in the press and on the internet during week commencing 4 September 2006. The post was advertised as a five year fixed term contract with the possibility of renewal. The successful candidate took up post on 1 February 2007 and his contract was recently renewed with effect from 1 February 2012.

School Principals

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Education to (i) outline any previous agreements made to create a panel for school principals to improve consultation with education sectors; and (ii) how many times any such panel has met.

(AQW 8475/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department has not established a panel of school principals, and has no plans to do so. My Department will continue to consult a broad range of education stakeholders, including boards of governors, school principals, and representative sectoral bodies.

Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit: DE Recommendations

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Education how his Department intends to take forward the recommendations of the Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit.

(AQO 1344/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I will shortly publish action plans for each report setting out the action my Department will be taking in regards the PEDU report. Some of that action will be immediate; other areas will be addressed as we move towards the establishment of ESA which will be providing single, regional services in these and other service areas.

I want to be sure that the services provided in support of pupils and schools are both efficient and effective and represent value for money. In a challenging financial climate I also want to ensure that funding is prioritised towards frontline education services.

Pupils: Travel to School Time

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Education what rules or guidance are in place in relation to the maximum travel time allowed for pupils travelling from home to school.

(AQW 8533/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There are no specific rules or guidance in relation to the maximum travel time allowed for pupils travelling from home to school. Parents define what is an acceptable journey for their child to take.

The extent to which the issue of a journey's acceptability has a role in support provided under the Home-to-School Transport scheme is as follows: once a school has been selected by parents/children, if the pupil is eligible for transport assistance under the Home-to-School Transport Scheme, an obligation is placed on Boards under Article 52 of the Education (NI) Order 1986 (as amended) to facilitate attendance of the pupil at the school. Boards are required in paragraph 5.2 of the transport Circular 1996/41 (as amended), in determining their response in terms of transport assistance, to take into account such factors as the age of the pupil, whether it entails an unduly early start or late ending to the pupils period of absence from home, including the duration of the journey.

However, it is not always possible for Boards to reduce the journey time significantly, whilst also complying with the duty in Article 44 of the 1986 Order not to incur unreasonable public expenditure. Where journey times exceed approximately one hour for post-primary pupils and half an hour for primary school pupils, and where Boards have a limited ability to respond, then it is for parents to consider the impact of a long journey on their child's ability to perform acceptably in their chosen school.

Integrated Schools: Area Planning

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education whether the guidance to be issued by his Department, in relation to the area planning process, will specify the procedures to be followed to ensure that integrated schools and their plans for sustainability and growth are considered.

(AQO 1351/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Terms of Reference for Area Planning were issued to the Boards on 15 December 2011. They require the Boards, working with CCMS and other school sectors, to take account of the relevant Departmental policies and priorities, including the commitments in the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent legislation to encourage and facilitate Integrated and Irish-medium education. Guidance issued by my Department will supplement the Terms of Reference.

Post-primary Schools: Educational Achievement

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the recent report comparing achievement at post-primary level locally with results in England.

(AQO 1352/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: International evidence tells us that our education system, and the English system, are both average performers, so comparisons with England don't reflect my ambitions for a world-class education for our pupils.

The recent media coverage comparing post-primary education here with England completely failed to take account of the very different post-primary systems we operate.

In England there is a floor target that at least 35% of pupils in all schools will get 5 or more good GCSEs including English and maths. Whilst I don't want to comment in detail on the English system, floor targets for all schools only make sense if the vast majority of schools have similar intakes of students, as in England. Here, unregulated selection and rejection means we have schools with very different intake profiles. I set overall targets for the system, and then each school sets its own targets, which are monitored by the local ELB to ensure they are realistic yet challenging.

Tackling underachievement is my priority and I have a range of policies that are bringing about improvement, but more needs to be done for the sake of all our young people.

Special Educational Needs: Proposals

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Education how his proposals for special educational needs will end the delay in identifying and addressing the needs of pupils.

(AQO 1353/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My proposals aim to end delays through a comprehensive range of measures, which together will contribute to a framework that is more responsive, less bureaucratic and able to support children more quickly.

A straightforward 2-level framework will replace the cumbersome and outdated 5-stage process for identifying and meeting needs. Level 1 will be school-led and level 2 will be Education and Library Board-led. This will immediately reduce the delays where children slowly move through the 5 stages of the current process, without their needs being addressed earlier by schools.

I propose strengthening the duties on Boards of Governors to actively promote supports for SEN pupils in a timely manner. Schools would have a duty to ensure that every child with SEN has a Personal Learning Plan, setting out the interventions to be put in place, and the outcomes to be achieved. I will set out in statutory guidance the time limits within which I expect schools to provide supports.

A comprehensive SEN Resource file is in every school, and together with online and E-learning materials, means that teachers are now immediately able to update their SEN knowledge and to take actions within their professional competence to support pupils. This will reduce the need for SEN information and advice to be sought from Board services in many cases.

Boards too would have a duty to set out their SEN support services for schools and pupils, with associated time limits set out in statutory guidance for these services to be made available.

The time taken by Boards to complete a statutory assessment would be reduced from 26 to 20 weeks, for those children with the greatest level of need.

I plan to reduce the bureaucracy associated with the current annual review process. A formal review of a coordinated support plan will only be conducted if either the parent or the school feels this is necessary. This will free up time within schools and Boards, which will be much better spent in supporting children's needs.

I have funded pilots in early years' settings and mainstream schools, which also play an important role in supporting SEN pupils. The pilots in early years' settings will increase capacity and at the same time identify more quickly those children who need targeted or individual support. The 'test user' pilots in mainstream schools will improve the skills of teachers in educational assessment, so that they can be more responsive to needs in-school and avoid delay in waiting for unnecessary educational psychology assessment.

Schools: Classroom Assistants

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Education to outline the position regarding the withdrawal of direct payments for Classroom Supervisory Assistants.

(AQO 1354/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Chief Executive of the South-Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) wrote to the Principals of all Post-Primary schools in the SEELB on 28 September 2011 to advise them that the Board was reviewing the payment of Supervisory Assistants. The SEELB proposed that as Supervisory Assistance is a universal requirement for pupils attending mainstream school, in most circumstances, it should be the responsibility of the management of the school to ensure and fund adequate adult supervision during breaks including the lunch time period. Principals were invited to submit their views/comments on the proposal.

The post of Classroom Supervisory Assistant is a distinct post separate from that of Special Needs Classroom Assistant. Staff employed as Supervisory Assistants are employed on a contract that relates to that post only.

Where a pupil's statement requires supervision/assistance at lunchtime/break times, this will continue to be funded by the Board.

Officers in Special Education within the SEELB will consider requests for specific supervisory assistant support in respect of pupils with statements which do not specify lunchtime supervision. In the event of the Board being satisfied that supervisory assistant support is required for a named pupil, the associated costs will be charged to the Board.

No other Education and Library Board issued a letter regarding the withdrawal of direct payments for Classroom Supervisory Assistants.

Schools: Influence on Children

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Education how his Department calculates the level of influence that schools have on the education of children.

(AQO 1355/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Every school is subject to inspection by the Education Training Inspectorate (ETI). The ETI provide an external, professional assessment of provision in our schools and comments on the school's leadership and management; the standards achieved by all the pupils in the school, especially in literacy and numeracy; and the quality of teaching and learning.

We know that a child's background too often has an influence on their attainment in our education system, and that is not acceptable. Other education systems have successfully broken this link, and to quote a 2010 OECD report on the issue of overcoming social background "The best performing school systems manage to provide high-quality education to all students".

My concern is to minimise the negative influence of factors outside the school, especially for our most disadvantaged pupils, and to emulate the success of systems such as Canada and Finland.

There is a clear danger in focusing on quantifying how factors outside school negatively impact on education, as this can provide an excuse for educational underachievement, entrenching low expectations, and becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. We know what raises standards, and improves outcomes for pupils regardless of their backgrounds: good teaching in well-led schools, supported by their communities, that put pupils' interests at the heart of their decisions.

We have examples, in our own system, of schools serving disadvantaged communities that have successfully broken this link for large numbers of pupils. We need to make this the reality for all our pupils.

Schools: Viability Audit

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the viability audit.

(AQO 1356/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The first viability audits were received from the Education and Library Boards on the 16th of January. As they did not fulfil the requirements of the terms of reference, I asked for them to be resubmitted in two stages.

The first part of the report which includes the basis information in relation to the criteria, enrolment, quality and finance, was received by the Department on the 6th of February.

The second part of the report which presents high level proposals to address issues in those schools demonstrating stress was received on the 15th of February.

My officials are now examining the viability audits and will be working closely with the school managing authorities in the context of area planning taking account of the information in the audits.

The Viability Audits will be published as soon as practicable.

Special Educational Needs: Legislative Protection

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Education what legislative protection will be in place for pupils with special educational needs following the outcome of the Special Educational Needs review.

(AQO 1357/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Review of Special Educational Needs & Inclusion has given careful consideration to the legislative protection for children with special educational needs.

Firstly, I propose to retain the current legal definition of SEN as contained in the 1996 Education Order, so that confusion is not caused by the creation of a definition of additional educational needs.

I also propose to introduce statutory coordinated support plans, for special needs children with the greatest level of need, which will afford parents broadly the same legal rights for educational provision and for appeal as currently exist for statements.

I propose to ensure that the dispute avoidance and resolution service for parents, in dispute with schools or Education and Library Boards, is provided in a more independent way than at present.

The annual school census for 2010 records some 64,900 children with special educational needs in our schools. As Minister I want to take measures that will ensure that the needs of all these children are addressed, not only those who have the individual statutory protections afforded by a coordinated support plan.

I therefore propose to strengthen the general duties on boards of governors of mainstream schools to support all children with special needs. I want to ensure that every SEN child will have the actions required by the school to support their needs clearly set out in a Personal Learning Plan, which will be put in place by the school. Importantly the Personal Learning Plan will also set out the outcomes to be achieved that will enable each child to reach his or her potential.

These measures will provide parents with a greater assurance that their child's educational needs will be addressed by their school. They will reduce the delays in accessing provision that children currently face as a direct result of the current framework.

I also want to ensure that the Boards, and in time the Education and Skills Authority, are better prepared to assist the schools with provision, interventions, training and support in a more flexible and timely way than at present. I therefore aim to strengthen their duty to set out the offer of SEN services that they will make available to all schools.

Department for Employment and Learning

Universities: Foreign Students

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many foreign students are attending Northern Ireland universities in the 2011/12 academic year; and how many students left Northern Ireland to attend a university in other parts of the UK in the same period.

(AQW 7619/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): As there are various definitions of 'Foreign students' and limited coverage within the NI Higher Education Sector data, 'Country of Domicile' has been used in this instance as a valid proxy. The number of student enrolments, across all years of study, full-time and part-time and undergraduate and postgraduate provision, at Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) by domicile in 2010/11 is detailed in the table below.

Country of domicile	Total enrolments
Northern Ireland	43,960

Country of domicile	Total enrolments
Great Britain	1,455
Republic of Ireland	4,285
Other European Union	370
Non European Union	1,945

In the same period (2010/11), there were 16,730 Northern Ireland domiciled students enrolled at HEIs in Great Britain, across all years of study, full-time and part-time and undergraduate and postgraduate provision.

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

- 1 Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5.
- 2 The latest available data are for 2010/11.

Queens University Belfast and Stranmillis University College: Proposed Merger

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an estimate of the total cost of the merger of Stranmillis University College and Queen's University.

(AQW 7620/11-15)

Dr Farry: It is estimated that the merger will generate annual savings of up to £1.5m per annum. In preparation for the merger, costs amounting to £378k have been incurred by my Department, Stranmillis and Queen's University since 2008 on issues such as the business case, consultation, Equality Impact Assessment, survey reports and evaluations and management and administration. No further costs are accruing at present. I have also advised you previously that should the merger proceed, it would be neutral in budgetary terms for this Department.

Current/Capital Budget Allocation

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether his departmental revenue expenditure varies proportionately to his capital budget allocation.

(AQW 7640/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Executive's budget allocations to departments are divided into capital and current (revenue). The revenue expenditure by the Department for Employment and Learning does not vary proportionately or disproportionately to its capital budget allocation – they are different types of funding and are not related.

Queens University Belfast and Stranmillis University College: Proposed Merger

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what meetings he or his officials have had, or intend to have, with the Equality Commission in relation to the proposed merger of Queen's University and Stranmillis University College.

(AQW 7656/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have had one meeting with the Equality Commission to discuss their response to the consultation exercise on the proposed merger of Queen's University and Stranmillis University College. My officials have not had any meetings with the Commission in relation to the proposed merger.

Civil Service: Posts

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many Civil Service posts existed in his Department at (i) Administrative Assistant; (ii) Administrative Officer; (iii) Executive Officer 2; (iv)

Executive Officer 1; (v) Staff Officer; (vi) Deputy Principal; (vii) Grade 7; and (viii) Grade 6 levels, at the beginning of (a) 2007; and (b) 2012, broken down by local Council area.

(AQW 7693/11-15)

Dr Farry: This information has been placed in the Library and on my department's website: <http://www.delni.gov.uk>.

Equality Unit

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the (i) number; and (ii) annual cost of staff employed in his Department's Equality Unit.

(AQW 7715/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department for Employment and Learning currently has two Civil Servants who are employed on a full-time basis in the Department's Equality Unit. Salary costs have been provided in terms of pay bands as release of the information requested would result in a breach of the Data Protection Act 1998, in particular the first data protection principle of the Act.

Civil Servants employed in Equality Unit	Grade	Pay Band at 1 August 2011
1	Deputy Principal	£34,163 - £38,893
1	Staff Officer	£27,115 - £30,520

Recruitment Agencies: DEL Spend

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the amount paid to recruitment agencies for (i) full-time; and (ii) part-time posts in his Department, and its arm's-length bodies, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 7744/11-15)

Dr Farry: The amount paid to recruitment agencies within the Department for Employment and Learning, and its arms-length bodies, in each of the last three years is as follows:

Financial Year	Amount Paid £'000
2008/09	355
2009/10	370
2010/11	175
Total:	900

Figures above relate to full-time posts.

ApprenticeshipsNI

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) how many ApprenticeshipsNI programmes are currently running; (ii) how often each programme is inspected; and (iii) what checks are used to ensure that the programmes represent value for money.

(AQW 7775/11-15)

Dr Farry: ApprenticeshipsNI is my Department's flagship training model for those in employment. Apprentices can choose from over 100 apprenticeship frameworks which cover training in a diverse range of occupational areas. Despite the present economic and fiscal difficulties facing employers, current occupancy is very encouraging with around 11,600 apprentices participating on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme.

My Department has contracts with forty-nine training suppliers to deliver the ApprenticeshipsNI programme on its behalf. To ensure the effective use of public resources, the provision of good quality training and contract compliance my Department has a cycle of inspection programmes which each training supplier must comply with.

My Department's Quality and Performance Branch maintains regular, consistent and robust reviews of suppliers' overall performance and monitors each supplier at least once per year. Additional monitoring visits take place if significant shortcomings have been identified. Comprehensive reports are produced detailing findings and highlighting issues, where applicable, which suppliers must address and which are followed up by officials.

The Department's Financial Audit and Support Team (FAST) inspect training suppliers annually and all will be visited as a minimum once every 18 months. The main aim of the FAST inspections is to provide an assurance as to the safeguarding of public monies in funded organisations. This is achieved through a series of audit tests aimed at assessing the adequacy and effectiveness of the supplier's system of financial control within the programmes, the degree of compliance with Departmental guidelines and other related instructions, and the accuracy, reliability and completeness of associated accounting records.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) inspect all of the Department's contracted work-based learning provision on a three year inspection cycle. This means that all contracted training suppliers of the ApprenticeshipsNI programme will have a full inspection of their training provision conducted once every three years. The outcome of each inspection is a published report, which is accessible on the ETI's web site. The structure of each published report follows the headings and performance indicators outlined in the Improving Quality: Raising Standards (IQ: RS) document. The three main sections of the report evaluate, for the ApprenticeshipsNI programme the supplier is contracted to provide, the Quality of the Leadership and Management, Achievements and Standards and the Quality of Provision for Learning.

Within the IQ:RS there is an indicator on public value, which evaluates the extent to which a supplier manages its resources well enough to ensure that it provides cost effective, high quality training that meets the needs of local and regional economies, employers and communities.

A robust inspection programme including value for money considerations will continue to play a key role in the quality monitoring of the ApprenticeshipsNI programme.

Care Leavers: Specialist Employment Schemes

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what specialist employment schemes for care leavers his Department (i) fully funds; and (ii) partly funds; and what other schemes he is aware of that are not funded by his Department.

(AQW 7821/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department does not provide schemes which solely target care leavers; however my officials work closely with Health and Social Care Trust staff to enhance the employability of care leavers. This joint working is undertaken through a Regional Steering Group, jointly chaired with the Health and Social Care Board, which takes forward a range of activity to improve the support available to care leavers. This ranges from better arrangements for careers guidance and a more flexible approach to Steps to Work participation, to extended age criteria for participation on the Training for Success programme. My Department will continue to place a high priority on providing assistance to removing barriers to employment, training and education.

In addition, my Department contributes to a cross Departmental strategy, led by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, called "Care Matters in Northern Ireland". This strategy has brought forward a number of initiatives to improve the employment outcomes for young people leaving care, which include the establishment of dedicated employability schemes in each Health and Social Care Trust area.

Care Leavers: Career Opportunities

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what support is available for young carers, who leave school with no qualifications, to help them access further or higher education.

(AQW 7822/11-15)

Dr Farry: DEL's Careers Service has in place partnership agreements with post-primary schools across Northern Ireland (NI) to support the schools' careers education programmes. These allow schools, in consultation with careers advisers, the opportunity to select from a range of services appropriate to the needs of their pupils, including young carers. This support includes the offer of an individual careers guidance interview for all year 12 pupils before they decide on a career pathway. During the interview all options, including access to further and higher education are discussed.

In addition, the agreement facilitates the identification and referral of young people with significant barriers to employment, such as those with caring responsibilities. Careers guidance services can also be accessed by young people and adults in Careers Resource Centres/Offices, JobCentres and Jobs and Benefit Offices throughout NI. Arrangements are also in place to enable clients availing of Employment Service support to access careers guidance. This may include young carers.

The Higher and Further Education institutions can provide specific support/guidance through their pastoral care arrangements, for those who choose to disclose that they are a carer. The pastoral care provided should contribute to retaining young carers in their courses. The importance of self disclosure should not be under-estimated.

Teachers: STEM Subjects

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people qualified as teachers in each of the STEM subjects at post-primary level in each of the last three years.

(AQW 7837/11-15)

Dr Farry: For all institutions, the number of newly qualified teachers in STEM subjects at post-primary level in each of the last three years was:

2008/9	114
2009/10	127
2010/11	139

Apprenticeships: Public Sector

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what plans he has to create more apprentice positions in the public sector, given the shortfall in the private sector due to the economic downturn.

(AQW 7860/11-15)

Dr Farry: The ApprenticeshipsNI programme is an employer-led provision and, as such, it is employers and not my Department that create apprenticeship positions. Despite the present economic and fiscal difficulties facing employers, current occupancy is very encouraging with around 11,600 apprentices participating on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme.

Public Sector employees, including those employed by Local Councils, are not eligible for ApprenticeshipsNI funding. The Public Sector can, and has benefitted from the ApprenticeshipsNI training model but the funding for public sector employees is a matter for their Departments or Public Sector organisations.

Certificate of Religious Education

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 6767/11-15, in relation to students from Stranmillis University College, Belfast sitting the Catholic Certificate of

Religious Education at St Mary's University College, Belfast, and to clarify whether this idea has been suggested and considered.

(AQW 7875/11-15)

Dr Farry: In response to AQW 6767/11-15, I responded, "I believe that all students should be able to access the Certificate of Religious Education locally and the way forward you have suggested is one option in making this a reality." This idea will be explored during the study on the teacher education infrastructure in Northern Ireland which I announced on 28 November 2011.

Hospitality: Spend

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 6357/11-15, whether the figures provided include his Department's arm's-length bodies; and if not, to provide this information for each of the last five years.

(AQW 7895/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department's response to AQW 6357/11-15 did not include arms-length bodies. The total spend on hospitality by the Department's arm's-length bodies in each of the last five years was as follows:

2006-07	£10,187
2007-08	£10,554
2008-09	£14,641
2009-10	£11,914
2010-11	£10,147

Human Resources

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many staff are employed in his Department's Human Resources section.

(AQW 7939/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department for Employment and Learning currently employs 2094 staff of which 29 work in the Human Resources section.

Stranmillis University College: Board of Governors

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people currently sit on the Board of Governors of Stranmillis University College, Belfast.

(AQW 7947/11-15)

Dr Farry: Eleven people currently sit on the Board of Governors of Stranmillis University College, Belfast.

Stranmillis University College: Staff Meeting

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 6899/11-15, whether he attended the meeting with staff at Stranmillis University College, Belfast, on 19 January 2012.

(AQW 7953/11-15)

Dr Farry: I did not attend a meeting with the staff of Stranmillis University College on 19 January 2012.

Teachers: English at Post-primary Level

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of newly qualified English teachers at post-primary level in each of the last three years.

(AQW 7988/11-15)

Dr Farry: For all institutions, the number of newly qualified English teachers at post-primary level in each of the last three years was:

2008/9	40
2009/10	32
2010/11	39

Belfast Metropolitan College: Former Premises

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) for an update on the restrictive use covenants on the former premises of the Belfast Metropolitan College; (ii) how much has been paid, and to whom; and (iii) what restrictions remain for the future use of the premises.

(AQW 7994/11-15)

Dr Farry: In 2004, the then Belfast Institute of Further & Higher Education paid £150,000 to the Royal Belfast Academical Institution to relax a covenant in the lease for its College Square East building. The covenant was changed from “educational purposes only” to the following restrictions – “as a public house; as an off-licence; as a bookmakers; as a casino or other place for gambling; as licensed premises for the sale of intoxicating liquor on or off the premises except where this is ancillary to the use of the premises as a hotel; or for any illegal or immoral purpose”. This means all other uses such as residential accommodation are now possible.

There are no usage restrictions relating to the Brunswick Street Building.

Steps to Work: Employment

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what percentage of people who have participated in the Steps to Work programme found employment at any stage, by 31 January 2012.

(AQW 8000/11-15)

Dr Farry: Since the Steps to Work programme was introduced in September 2008, twenty-six percent of people who have participated in the programme found employment by March 2011 (the latest date for which statistics are available).

Questions for Written Answer: Stationery Costs

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much his Department has spent on stationery costs in replying to Assembly Written Questions, including the price of the envelopes and paper used, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8016/11-15)

Dr Farry: The overall stationery budget for my Department is recorded in such a manner that it does not allow for the costing of individual tasks. I am therefore unable to provide the information requested.

Apprenticeships: South Eastern Regional College

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people on apprenticeship programmes at the South Eastern Regional College lost their work placement in the 2010/11 academic year.

(AQW 8053/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Programme-Led Apprenticeship (PLA) programme offers a similar training opportunity as the employer-led, ApprenticeshipsNI, by providing a participant with the opportunity to gain a full apprenticeship framework at Level 2. The work placement is a fundamental element of the PLA programme ensuring that the participant can gain evidence towards a competence based qualification.

I am aware that some training suppliers are finding it difficult to source relevant work placements with employers given the current economic situation.

The South Eastern Regional College has advised that it does not maintain a register of all work placements lost with the exception of those lost as a direct result of an employer's economic situation, such as a specific piece or period of sustained work coming to an end. Other reasons for loss of placement would include non-attendance by the participant or motivational or attitudinal issues.

Of the 685 PLA participants currently at the South Eastern Regional College, ten have lost their placement directly due to the employer's economic situation.

Step Ahead

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how the new Step Ahead scheme is being run compared with the previous scheme; and what he plans to do when the funding runs out.

(AQW 8069/11-15)

Dr Farry: Step Ahead was introduced on 28 September 2009 and provided fixed term waged employment places within the voluntary/community sector for a maximum of 26 weeks. This was available to those on benefits for 30 months or more. Recruitment to Step Ahead ceased in November last year.

Additional in-year funding was made available enabling Step Ahead to be re-introduced within the Steps to Work programme on 13 January 2012. This second phase provides fixed term waged employment places offering participants up to 10 weeks employment in the voluntary/community sector. The eligibility criteria has also been widened to target all those in receipt Jobseeker's Allowance for a maximum of three months or more, or those on Income Support, Incapacity Benefit or Employment & Support Allowance with no qualifying period.

Subject to resource availability it is planned to reinstate a variant of the Step Ahead strand of Steps to Work in April 2012.

Fuel: DEL Spend

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much his Department, and its agencies, have spent on fuel in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8094/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department for Employment and Learning had no expenditure on fuel in each of the last five financial years (2006/7 - 2010/11).

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Smart Meters

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the implementation of the recommendation within the Strategic Energy Framework on Smart Energy Metering.

(AQW 7065/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): The EU Third Internal Energy Package (IME 3) requires a cost benefit analysis on intelligent metering to be completed by September 2012.

The Utility Regulator has now completed the cost benefit analysis and it is currently being considered by my officials. I intend to announce my policy position on smart metering shortly.

In the meantime however the Utility Regulator has two small smart meter trials in their early stages. These focus on technology and smart grid application, and, customer behaviour and education, with a specific focus on how smart meters could help customers vulnerable to fuel poverty.

Fibre Optic Cable: Monaghan, Cavan and Enniskillen

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the study commissioned by her Department, and the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, in 2009, which recommended the laying of fibre optic cable between Monaghan, Cavan and Enniskillen, to enhance the provision of high speed telecommunications infrastructure in the border region.

(AQW 7624/11-15)

Mrs Foster: While my Department supported the March 2009 study, lead responsibility for commissioning the report lay with the ROI's Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources. My Department's telecoms priorities are set out in DETI's 'A Telecommunications Action Plan for Northern Ireland 2011-2015', which underwent a full public consultation. We have no plans to deliver projects beyond those set out in our Action Plan.

Energy Provision

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 7009/11-15, to list the (i) dates; (ii) subject matter; (iii) level of contact; and (iv) means of communication for the period in question.

(AQW 7661/11-15)

Mrs Foster: During 2011, my Department engaged directly with the European Commission by way of e-mail and meeting with officials and indirectly through a number of Whitehall Departments, on topics including State Aid application, Climate Change Levy and the Third Package of Energy Legislation.

Petroleum Licence Holders: Rights

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what rights petroleum licence holders have in relation to the selling, or transferring, of their licences to other companies.

(AQW 7751/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The rights of petroleum licence holders in relation to selling or transferring their licences to other companies are governed by Clause 39 (Restrictions on Assignment) in Schedule 2 (Model Clauses) to the Petroleum Production Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1987 as amended by the Petroleum Production (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010).

Under that Clause, the holder of a Petroleum Licence which has been granted by DETI, is not permitted to assign any part of the Petroleum Licence without the consent of DETI in writing.

That legislation and the associated Model Clauses are specifically referenced in all Petroleum Production Licences granted by the Department since May 2010.

Renewable Energy Targets: Assistance

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what assistance is available to help businesses meet renewable energy targets.

(AQW 7770/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Individual businesses do not have renewable energy targets – however as set out in the Executive agreed Strategic Energy Framework, Northern Ireland as a whole has a target to generate 40% of its electricity consumption and 10% of its heat requirement from renewable sources by 2020.

There are no grants available from my Department to assist businesses meet renewable energy targets. Instead, renewable electricity generators are incentivised through the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation which provides a revenue stream once the generating plant is in operation. This provides the fiscal driver to meet the renewable energy targets.

DETI has recently consulted on proposals to provide financial support for a range of renewable heat installations. It has been proposed that the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) will first be available

to non-domestic customers and later extended to the domestic sector. My Department is currently carrying out further analysis on the proposed scheme in advance of finalising levels of support. An announcement will be made in due course.

Invest NI provides a range of support for businesses to help reduce the cost of water, energy or materials consumption. This support includes the provision of free project management consultancy to identify, prioritise and take forward appropriate cost saving projects including renewable energy projects where appropriate. Invest NI also provides the funding for the Energy Efficiency Loan fund delivered by Carbon Trust which offers interest-free loans from £3,000 - £400,000 to Northern Ireland businesses to help them deploy more energy efficient and/or carbon reducing solutions. Many types of project will be considered for loans including renewable energy projects provided they meet the on-site carbon saving requirement.

Invest NI also assists companies with the necessary capabilities to enter renewable energy supply chains and these companies are invited to participate in various Trade and Technology transfer programmes and events that promote and develop their capability.

Business Start-up Programme: Tender Process

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in relation to the bid for the Business Start-Up Programme, whether the Belfast office of KPMG is conjoined with the Glasgow based Go Group, which was barred from tendering for contracts in Scotland because of gross professional misconduct arising from a breach of confidentiality.

(AQW 7789/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Belfast office of KPMG is associated with the Go Group bid for the tender in question. To the best of the Department's understanding the Go Group voluntarily withdrew from a number of procurement competitions due to allegations of breach of confidentiality by one person within that organisation. The matter is currently being considered in the course of ongoing litigation.

Enterprise Development Programme: KPMG Role

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether KPMG was appointed by InvestNI to undertake the monitoring agent role for the Enterprise Development Programme, which includes the auditing and vouching of work.

(AQW 7790/11-15)

Mrs Foster: KPMG were appointed in December 2008 after a tender process to undertake the Monitoring Agent role in the Enterprise Development Programme.

The terms of reference for this role included an ongoing quality assurance and an audit and activity verification role across all delivery agents, reporting to Invest NI on any non-compliance and identifying opportunities for continuous improvement.

The identification of need for the role was contained within the recommendations arising out of the Start a Business Programme (SABP) audit in 2007. This audit was carried out as a result of Invest NI identifying a number of potential irregularities in relation to the Enterprise Northern Ireland delivery of the programme. The report's recommendations reflected that significant programmes such as SABP and any new programmes are subject to appropriately robust programme management arrangements and these arrangements should include regular review of the programme to ensure all requirements are being complied with. It further recommended that there should be a comprehensive audit of activity and governance arrangements to provide assurance to Invest NI on the probity of the programme and the effectiveness of its delivery.

Enterprise Development Programme: KPMG Payment

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much KPMG was paid to perform the monitoring agent role for the Enterprise Development Programme for the duration of the programme. **(AQW 7791/11-15)**

Mrs Foster: KPMG performed the role of Monitoring Agent on the Enterprise Development Programme between December 2008 and October 2011 and the cost to Invest NI was £699,074 Inc VAT.

The cost of the role should be viewed against overall programme delivery costs of £6,720,266 for the same period.

The identification of need for the role was contained within the recommendations arising out of the Start a Business Programme (SABP) audit in 2007. This audit was carried out as a result of Invest NI identifying a number of potential irregularities in relation to the Enterprise Northern Ireland delivery of the programme. The report's recommendations reflected that significant programmes such as SABP and any new programmes are subject to appropriately robust programme management arrangements and these arrangements should include regular review of the programme to ensure all requirements are being complied with. It further recommended that there should be a comprehensive audit of activity and governance arrangements to provide assurance to Invest NI on the probity of the programme and the effectiveness of its delivery.

Business Start-up Programme: KPMG Payment

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether KPMG was separately commissioned by InvestNI to provide an additional 'Concept Paper' on the Business Start-Up Programme; and if so, how much KPMG was paid for providing this paper and from which budget was their fee for this service paid. **(AQW 7792/11-15)**

Mrs Foster: KPMG were asked, as part of their monitoring agent role for the Enterprise Development Programme (EDP) and their agreed January to June 2011 work plan for that period to produce a concept paper considering 2 principal subject areas: payment structure and targets.

The payment structure element considered any examples of output related funding in other business start/enterprise programmes. It also considered the feasibility of implementing an Output Related Payment (ORP) regime within the start-up element of the EDP.

This work was within the parameters of the terms of reference for the monitoring agent role which reflected ongoing reviews of programme concept and payment structures, identifications/recommendations to drive best practice and continuous improvement and annual review of targets.

The cost to Invest NI for this paper was £9,480 and was paid to KPMG as part of their Monitoring Agent fee.

Titanic Signature Project: Promotion

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what work is being carried out in conjunction with the Department of Culture, Media and Sport to promote the Titanic signature project as an international event. **(AQW 7804/11-15)**

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) has agreed a Memorandum of Understanding with Visit Britain (the lead organisation working with the Department of Culture, Media and Sport on the promotion of Great Britain as a destination during The Olympic Games 2012) which enables the promotion of the Titanic signature project on Visit Britain websites. This includes links to a Northern Ireland database, a filmed Northern Ireland itinerary video on Visit Britain TV channel and on-going content on the Tourism 2012 Games Website including information on the Titanic Signature Project.

'Our Time, Our Place' Initiative

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the inclusivity of the events advertised in the Tourist Board's Our Time Our Place showcase; and whether other events could have been included.

(AQW 7808/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The "Our Time, Our Place" initiative is designed to change perceptions of Northern Ireland. Its focus is the new tourist investment and other one-off high profile events happening in 2012. Supporting these will be a range of other events although the programme for these is still being drawn up.

There are 8 high profile and motivational Tier 1 events which were selected on the basis of set criteria and approved by an independent steering group. Their objective is to create new images of Northern Ireland, generate additional business and inspire chat. These are supported by 52 Tier 2 events which have been awarded funding support under the widely publicised Tourism Events Fund. These are widely distributed throughout Northern Ireland and funding criteria were aligned to ni2012.

The programme continues to evolve and further events are being added to the listing as details are made available to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. All events listed are included on discovernorthernireland.com.

Renewable Energy Targets: Assistance

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to list all the grants that are available in relation to renewable energy; and to detail how these grants can be obtained by individuals or organisations.

(AQW 7831/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There are no grants available from my department for the generation of renewable electricity. Instead, renewable electricity generators are incentivised through the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation which provides a revenue stream once the generating plant is in operation.

DETI has recently consulted on proposals to provide financial support for a range of renewable heat installations. It has been proposed that the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) will first be available to non-domestic customers and later extended to the domestic sector. My department is currently carrying out further analysis on the proposed scheme in advance of finalising levels of support. An announcement will be made in due course.

Invest NI provides a range of support for companies interested in investigating deployment of renewable energy technologies as well as other resource efficiency projects to help reduce operating costs. This support includes free resource efficiency audits, action plans and project management support to help businesses to implement the most cost effective cost saving opportunities including, where appropriate, renewable energy technologies.

Invest NI also provides funding for the Energy Efficiency Loan Fund which is managed and delivered by Carbon Trust. The Loan Fund offers interest-free loans from £3,000 - £400,000 to Northern Ireland businesses to help them install more energy efficient equipment. Each project will be assessed on its potential to deliver energy and carbon dioxide savings.

Invest NI can also provide support to businesses with the capability to enter renewable energy supply chains. Such companies are invited to participate in a range of Trade and Technology transfer programmes and events that promote and develop their capability.

Business Start-up Programme: Tender Process

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) if she is aware that InvestNI decided on 6 September 2011, to award the new Business Start-Up Programme to the GO Group which is based in Glasgow; (ii) whether this is the same organisation that was found guilty of misconduct in Scotland in respect of breaches of confidentiality, which resulted in an out-of-court settlement in

favour of Innovation Centres Scotland; (iii) whether this conduct was deemed to have been sufficiently serious to result in the GO Group being barred from tendering for four contracts in Scotland, including contracts for Scottish Enterprise; (iv) whether InvestNI was aware, since 15 November 2011, of the out-of-court settlement and whether it has taken any action; (v) whether the GO Group declared the breach of confidentiality in its pre-tender questionnaire for the Business Start-Up Programme; and (vi) why, after four months, and mounting legal costs, InvestNI has not yet taken a decision on the possible disqualification of the GO Group.

(AQW 7868/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

- (i) I am aware that Invest NI decided to award the contract for the new Business Start Programme to a consortium including the Go Group based in Glasgow.
- (ii) to (vi) To the best of the knowledge of the Department and Invest NI the Go Group voluntarily withdrew from a number of procurement competitions due to allegations of breach of confidentiality by one person within that organisation. This matter is currently being considered in the course of ongoing litigation.

Invest NI: Land for Economic Development

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail how much available land InvestNI has in each district council area.

(AQW 7900/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI has c760 acres of land across Northern Ireland available to support economic development.

A table has been attached at Annex A providing the breakdown of this figure by district council area.

TABLE SHOWING THE BREAKDOWN OF INVEST NI'S AVAILABLE LAND BY DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA.

District Council	Available land* (acres)
Antrim	26.50
Ards	4.10
Armagh	7.00
Ballymena	31.60
Ballymoney	4.50
Banbridge	0.00
Belfast	20.90
Carrickfergus	18.80
Castlereagh	0.00
Coleraine	48.80
Cookstown	5.14
Craigavon	177.70
Londonderry	104.47
Down	50.90
Dungannon	28.50
Fermanagh	36.60

District Council	Available land* (acres)
Larne	4.70
Limavady	16.50
Lisburn	20.81
Magherafelt	27.10
Moyle	2.00
Newry & Mourne	0.00
Newtownabbey	98.00
North Down	20.10
Omagh	4.80
Strabane	0.63
Total	760.15

* Figures are correct as at 31st December 2011

Creative Industries: Invest NI Funding

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many companies which provide Creative Industries products and services have received funding from InvestNI in each of the last three years, broken down by (i) council area; and (ii) the total value of the funding allocated to each council area. **(AQW 7957/11-15)**

Mrs Foster: Creative Industries are those activities which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property (Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)). The DCMS identifies the Creative Industries sector as consisting of 13 sectors and sub-sectors. The sectors can be grouped into three broad categories:

- 1 Design Related Studies: Architecture, Art and Antiques market, Crafts, Design and Designer Fashion;
- 2 Expression Industries: Music, Performing arts and Visual arts; and,
- 3 Media and Information Industries: Advertising, Film and Video, Interactive Leisure Software, Software and Computer Services, Television and Radio.

Invest NI's sectoral priorities in Creative Industries reflect those sub-sector areas that offer the greatest potential for growth and in driving a shift to higher added value and productivity levels, namely Software; and the Creative Content Production sectors of Film & Television; Digital Content/Media; and Music.

A breakdown of the number of companies and the level of support provided by Invest NI to clients operating in these sub-sectors of the Creative Industries (by District Council Area) is provided at Annex A. This table indicates that over the period in question Invest NI directly supported 396 businesses offering total assistance of £38.4m. Invest NI does not allocate funding by council area for the Creative Industries but will consider support to any business based in Northern Ireland in this sector that satisfies Invest NI's eligibility criteria for support.

The figures presented do not take into account External Delivery Organisations engaged in supporting the Creative Industries sector that are in receipt of support from Invest NI, including Northern Ireland Screen and Craft NI. These organisations receive funding from a combination of Government and Non-Government organisations. For example, over the period in question Invest NI has provided £19.4m to Northern Ireland Screen, however, this agency also receives funding from DCAL, the National Lottery, British Film Institute and the Department of Culture Media & Sport.

ANNEX A

District Council Area	2008-09		2009-10		2010-11		Total	
	Number of Companies	Assistance Offered (£)	Number of Companies	Assistance Offered (£)	Number of Companies	Assistance Offered (£)	Number of Companies	Assistance Offered (£)
Antrim	3	113,192	5	90,141	3	9,165	11	212,498
Ardara	1	2,425	0	0	3	101,000	4	103,425
Armagh	2	62,200	2	26,576	2	34,500	6	123,276
Ballymena	1	1,600	1	6,000	0	0	2	7,600
Ballymoney	1	3,000	0	0	0	0	1	3,000
Banbridge	3	38,600	2	10,082	1	11,760	6	60,442
Belfast	48	2,882,637	55	13,916,601	50	4,737,445	153	21,536,683
Carrickfergus	1	1,000	0	0	0	0	1	1,000
Castlereagh	4	207,448	6	141,979	12	291,466	22	640,893
Coleraine	3	31,204	3	41,363	4	107,994	10	180,561
Cookstown	1	49,586	2	20,086	3	33,682	6	103,354
Craigavon	3	107,519	4	18,492	4	44,109	11	170,120
Londonderry	12	1,992,504	14	1,238,989	14	336,326	40	3,567,819
Down	2	34,728	4	59,500	2	30,352	8	124,580
Dungannon	2	196,083	5	129,864	1	1,000	8	326,947
Fermanagh	2	11,400	2	4,800	1	25,414	5	41,614
Lisburn	8	147,497	10	283,171	8	187,168	26	617,836
Magherafelt	2	55,850	5	31,651	3	26,424	10	113,925

District Council Area	2008-09		2009-10		2010-11		Total	
	Number of Companies	Assistance Offered (£)	Number of Companies	Assistance Offered (£)	Number of Companies	Assistance Offered (£)	Number of Companies	Assistance Offered (£)
Moyle	1	4,980	0	0	1	4,000	2	8,980
Newry & Mourne	9	3,481,636	7	1,764,966	5	4,401,700	21	9,648,302
Newtownabbey	6	69,935	5	60,730	1	0	12	130,665
North Down	7	248,008	4	108,704	6	71,638	17	428,350
Omagh	6	94,884	5	139,748	2	41,225	13	275,857
Strabane	0	0	0	0	1	12,286	1	12,286
Total	128	9,837,916	141	18,093,443	127	10,508,654	396	38,440,013

Invest NI: Land

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what processes are in place to make land, which is not in use by Invest NI clients, available to other businesses.

(AQW 7967/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI has interpreted this question as referring to those processes the agency has in place to enable land that has been leased to businesses, but which has not been developed by them, to be made available to other companies.

The continuing economic downturn has had a significant impact upon the Northern Ireland business base. Many companies that had bought land from Invest NI prior to the downturn have been forced to postpone or even abandon expansion projects.

It is recognised that this land, which was bought during better economic times, can now place an additional burden on a company's finances. For such businesses Invest NI can, upon request, negotiate the removal of restrictive lease covenants which relate to the future assignment of their site.

In addition, for those businesses that have developed their land but been unable to complete their expansion project thereon, Invest NI has temporarily relaxed its restriction on sub-letting within its lease.

The above two measures will enable an assignment or a sub-let to companies that otherwise might not meet Invest NI's intervention criteria but undertake activities of an industrial nature.

Finally, the introduction of a "land buy back" option has enabled Invest NI to re-purchase undeveloped land it had previously sold. It is available only to those companies assessed to be in acute hardship as a result of the economic downturn and is intended as a short term measure.

Companies seeking further information on these matters should, in the first instance, contact their Invest NI Client Executive.

Equality Unit

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the current (i) number; and (ii) annual cost of staff employed in her Department's Equality Unit.

(AQW 7990/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

- (i) There are 2 staff in the Department's Equality Unit.
- (ii) This is personal data.

Renewable Heat Incentive: Bioliquid

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she would consider increasing the current subsidies for domestic use of bioliquid heating oil, under the UK-wide renewable heat incentive scheme.

(AQW 8004/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In July 2011, my Department consulted on proposals to introduce a specific Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) for Northern Ireland. Full details of the proposals are on the DETI website.

The consultation closed in October 2011 and in light of the responses received, my Department has been carrying out further analysis prior to developing a final policy position. I hope to make an announcement on the final design of the RHI shortly.

Questions for Written Answer: Stationery Costs

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much her Department has spent on stationery costs in replying to Assembly Written Questions, including the price of the envelopes and paper used, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8015/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The information requested is not held centrally and therefore to provide an answer would incur disproportionate cost.

Ferry Prices

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action is being taken to address the disparity in ferry prices between Northern Ireland and Great Britain; and the prices prevailing on Great Britain and European routes.

(AQW 8024/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The development and operation of ferry links, and the fares the operators charge, are entirely matters for commercial decision by individual sea carriers and the Northern Ireland and Great Britain (GB) ports.

Northern Ireland's ferry links with GB are essential to the growth of the local economy and to tourism in particular. To this end Tourism Ireland works closely with all the major ferry operators to highlight value fares, inclusive packages and ease of access to Northern Ireland.

Tourism Ireland has increased the level of resource available for co-operative marketing with both sea and air carriers in major markets and is investing in co-operative marketing activity with ferry operators such as Stena Line and P&O Lines. For example, between April and August 2011, Tourism Ireland, in partnership with P&O promoted "the shortest, fastest crossings" and value fares from Troon and Cairnryan to Larne. Similar promotional activity will take place in 2012.

Tourism Ireland: Northern Ireland Contribution

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) when she last reviewed Northern Ireland's contribution to Tourism Ireland Limited; (ii) what returns she has identified in each of the last three years; and (iii) whether she has any evidence of value for money.

(AQW 8036/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

- (i) I am continuously reviewing Northern Ireland's contribution to Tourism Ireland.
- (ii) During the last 3 years Tourism Ireland's extensive and targeted marketing campaigns were successful in showcasing the many visitor attractions and events on offer in Northern Ireland including:
 - a major US promotional campaign, with a showcase exhibition in Grand Central Station, New York – "Experience Northern Ireland, Titanic and More";
 - a special campaign "Belfast – City of Music" showcasing Belfast's rich musical heritage in Great Britain;
 - support for the Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013 bid;
 - targeting Ulster Scots tourism, in the US in particular;
 - the "Home of Champions" golf campaign, boosted by Major tournament wins by several Northern Ireland golfers; and
 - Belfast centre stage with the hosting of the MTV Europe Music Awards.
- (iii) I have ensured that the Tourism Ireland Corporate Plan 2011-13 contains specific and stretching targets for Northern Ireland and a continuing requirement to deliver annual efficiency savings of 3% cumulating to 9% over the period 2011 to 2013. A dedicated Great Britain Marketing Strategy

for Northern Ireland has also been agreed with Tourism Ireland and specific targets have been set to measure the impact of this Strategy. I am confident that with such measures in place, the Northern Ireland contribution to Tourism Ireland will provide value for money and ensure we take full advantage of the unprecedented opportunity of ni2012 to grow overseas tourism to Northern Ireland in 2012 and beyond.

Business Start-up Programme: GO Group

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) whether InvestNI was directed at the court hearing held on 31 January 2012, to make a decision on the disqualification of the GO Group; and (ii) when this decision will be made.

(AQW 8037/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

- (i) The court hearing on 31 January 2012 was adjourned by the judge to allow Invest NI to make a decision on whether to exclude Go Group from the procurement.
- (ii) Invest NI is currently considering this issue and a decision will be made in advance of the next court hearing later this month.

Foreign Direct Investment

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans she has to attract new Foreign Direct Investment, given that her Department has not utilised its budgetary allocation.

(AQW 8039/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest Northern Ireland focuses its limited resources on creating economic wealth through the creation of jobs, through attracting high quality Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) projects. It has for some time, had a successful track record in this area, punching above its weight when compared to other UK regions.

However it is important to remember that Invest NI contributes to investment in the form of match funding, where it invests only a portion of the overall cost of an investment project. Due to the sustained economic downturn and continued credit restrictions, many businesses have delayed plans to expand, re-invest and pursue new investments. In such circumstances, Invest NI is restricted by the amount that it can invest.

Over the past three years, Invest NI has made 131 offers of employment related financial assistance in the promotion of over 7,500 new jobs. The amount of investment made by Invest NI through these offers, totalled just over £119million with total planned investment of over £1.1billion

Invest NI's network of overseas offices is focussed on attracting FDI covering the areas of North America, Europe and South East Asia. Recently a number of new staff have been added to the sales teams in N America and South East Asia, in a renewed effort to capitalise on available FDI opportunities. Invest NI has also relocated staff resources to the Chicago area to maximize investment opportunities after recent success in the area including Chicago Mercantile Exchange.

Social Tariffs

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what consideration her Department has given to introducing social tariffs.

(AQW 8042/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I have no plans to introduce social tariffs.

Energy Prices: Impact on Low Income Families

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department intends to take to mitigate the impact of energy price rises on low income families.

(AQW 8043/11-15)

Mrs Foster: While my Department has no direct role in the setting of energy costs, it works with the Utility Regulator and other Departments on a range of energy matters including fuel poverty.

Low income families can mitigate against the disproportionate effect of energy price rises by ensuring that they seek the best deals available from energy suppliers, including availing of opportunities to switch suppliers, and by taking advantage of energy efficiency measures. A range of energy efficiency measures are available and targeted at low income consumers, including home insulation, energy saving light bulbs, and assistance to change from oil heating to natural gas. Such measures are provided through schemes such as the Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme and by energy supply companies directly.

Hotels: Capital Grants

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to list the 63 applications for capital grant support for hotel projects that InvestNI received between 1 April 2003 and 23 January 2012.

(AQW 8077/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Applications received by Invest NI are deemed to be confidential. Until a project receives an offer of support Invest NI does not disclose details as to do so might compromise the commercial viability of the project.

Invest NI does publish details of assistance offered and the table below lists offers made to hotel projects in the period 1 April 2003 to 23 January 2012.

May '03	Dunsilly Hotel	South Antrim
Sep '03	Mahons Hotel (IFI)	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
Mar '04	Old Inn, Crawfordsburn	North Down
May '04	Kilmorey Arms (IFI)	South Down
Oct '04	Hotel Carlton	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
Aug '05	Clandeboyne Lodge	North Down
Jun '05	Drummond Hotel (IFI)	East Londonderry
Aug '05	Slieve Donard	South Down
Nov '05	Carrybridge Hotel (IFI)	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
Nov '05	White Horse Hotel	Foyle
Dec '05	Magherabuoy House Hotel	East Londonderry
Apr '06	Galgorm Resort & Spa	North Antrim
Jun '06	Lough Erne Golf Resort	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
Jan '07	Holiday Inn Express, Craigavon	Upper Bann
Mar '08	Manor House Hotel	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
May '08	Fir Trees Hotel	West Tyrone
Jun '08	Bushmills Inn	North Antrim

May '03	Dunsilly Hotel	South Antrim
Mar '11	Beech Hill Country House Hotel	Foyle
Aug '11	Adair Arms	North Antrim

It should be noted that for some cases the initial application for these projects may have been received prior to 1 April 2003.

For completeness of information offers made on behalf of the International Fund for Ireland have been included.

Tourism: Londonderry Quay

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she will investigate the possibility of establishing a more visible and relevant tourism location at Londonderry Quay, to mark the spot where tens of thousands of Ulster Scots, including some of the most famous luminaries in the founding of the American Nation, departed for the USA in the 18th century.

(AQW 8129/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The emigration and diaspora story is significant in Londonderry and is one of the unique historic attractions identified by Londonderry City Council in their Tourism Development Strategy for 2009-2012. Within this Tourism Development Strategy are actions which explored options for the development of a major visitor attraction capitalising on Londonderry's history as an emigration port and "Gateway to the World", using the Quay's, river and Lough. This led to the completion of a feasibility study on the potential of a Maritime Museum. I am aware that Londonderry City Council has an application into NITB's Tourism Development Scheme seeking funding for the development of the Maritime Museum at Ebrington. This proposed museum will tell the story of Londonderry's wider Maritime Heritage, including the Diaspora and Emigration story, as well as showing Ebrington's role during World War Two and the Battle of the Atlantic.

The City Council in Londonderry has also identified other key maritime themed actions such as creating a maritime ambience on the tidal shoreline through creative public realm, public art and maritime events. There is also a proposal to design a themed tourism trail based on Social & Industrial History and Maritime.

Following the recent public realm work in Guildhall Square and Waterloo Place, the emigration statues that were in place there have now been installed along Londonderry Quay.

Tourism: Fermanagh

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the amount spent by her Department and its arm's-lengths bodies on promoting tourism products and facilities in each of the last ten years; (ii) her Department's total spend on promoting tourism products and facilities in Fermanagh in each of the last ten years, and what this represents as a percentage of the total spend on promoting tourism products and facilities in each year; (iii) the number of visitors in each of the last ten years; (iv) the total number of visitors to Co Fermanagh in each of the last ten years; (v) the percentage of the total number of visitors that visited Fermanagh in each of the last ten years; (vi) the actual, or estimated, spend of visitors in each of the last ten years; (vii) the actual, or estimated, spend of visitors to Co Fermanagh in each of the last ten years; (viii) the percentage of the actual, or estimated spend, of visitors that was spent in Fermanagh in each of the last ten years; (ix) the estimated economic value of the tourism sector for each of the last ten years; (x) the estimated economic value of the tourism sector in Fermanagh for each of the last ten years; (xi) the percentage of the total economic value that is derived from the tourism sector in Fermanagh in each of the last ten years; (xii) the total number of people employed in the tourism industry in each of the last ten years; (xiii) the number of people employed in the tourism industry in Fermanagh in each of the last ten years; (xiv) the percentage of the total number of people employed in the tourism industry that were employed

in Fermanagh in each of the last ten years; and (xv) the position of Fermanagh in the league table for visitor numbers to each district council area in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 8146/11-15)

Mrs Foster: It is not possible to answer this question without incurring disproportionate costs.

Fuel: DETI Spend

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much her Department, and its agencies, have spent on fuel in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8236/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment has spent the following amounts on fuel for its road vehicles:

Financial Year	Amount
2006 - 2007	£12262
2007 – 2008	£13120
2008 - 2009	£11400
2009 – 2010	£14474
2010 – 2011	£12795

Tourism Strategy

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQO 1232/11-15, when she will publish the Tourism Strategy.

(AQW 8258/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Member is referred to the answer to AQO 1232/11-15 which was published in the Hansard Weekly Answers Booklet for 10 February 2012. Page WA 80 refers.

Visa Requirements

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to list all the countries whose citizens would require a separate Visa should they wish to visit here after arriving in Dublin.

(AQW 8291/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The list of countries whose citizens would require a visa to visit all parts of the UK is available on the UK Border Agency website at <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/policyandlaw/immigrationlaw/immigrationrules/appendix1>

HCL BPO Services

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions her Department has had with HCL BPO Services NI in relation to the reported relocation from Armagh.

(AQW 8354/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I have met with senior representatives from HCL BPO Services over recent months and throughout our discussions have sought to retain and sustain as many jobs as possible for Northern Ireland. My officials in Invest NI have already proactively engaged with both existing and prospective investors to encourage them to consider the Armagh site and the associated infrastructure and skilled workforce as an excellent investment opportunity in the short term. HCL's decision to close Armagh is extremely regrettable but is as a direct result of current global economic conditions. I am somewhat encouraged that the company plans are firmly focused on investing in Northern Ireland and that HCL

expects to find alternative employment for around 40% of staff affected by the announcement during the course of the 90 day consultation period.

Department of the Environment

Renewable Energy: Planning Applications

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department intends to introduce a statutory response time for planning applications for renewable energy.

(AQW 4653/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): The majority of renewable energy applications are classified as major applications. The PSA (Public Service Agreement) target for major applications is to process 60% of applications to decision or withdrawal within 23 weeks. In the 2010/11 business year 50% of renewable energy applications were processed within 23 weeks. Within the renewable energy category, 55% of single wind turbine applications were processed within 23 weeks. These are applications which are often contentious in nature attracting a large number of objections which invariably has a constraining effect on the speed at which these applications can be processed. I am reviewing targets and the Department has been actively working on how to best improve processing times through a number of existing and proposed initiatives.

A statutory time period for determining planning applications, including renewable energy applications, is technically in place. This is 2 months or 16 weeks if an Environmental Statement has been submitted. After this time period the applicant may lodge an appeal in default of the decision to the Planning Appeals Commission, although I recognise that the cost, complexity and demands of doing so mean that this is not so widely availed of. These time periods do not apply if an application is being determined under Article 31 of The Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991.

I can confirm that I am actively looking at putting statutory timelimits in place in relation to the response times of statutory consultees. This would create a tighter planning environment and the better processing of applications, including for renewable, which may offer our single biggest economic opportunity. I intend to detail my ambitions in this regard in the near future.

MOT Test: Changes

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment (i) when the changes to the MOT test will come into effect; (ii) what changes and adaptations to test centres will be required; (iii) when the test centres will be ready; and (iv) how much it will cost to make the changes to the test centres.

(AQW 6023/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Implementation of the changes to the MOT test as a result of Commission Directive 2010/48/EU will be introduced on a phased basis.

a Phase 1 - Customer Advisory Period

For a three-month period from 1 February 2012, a vehicle examiner who identifies a defect relating to the new standards will advise the customer and indicate that from 1 May 2012 it will be a reason for rejection.

b Phase 2 – Full Implementation

From 1 May 2012 any defect relating to the new standards will be treated in the same way as any other defect.

This is in line with the implementation process being adopted by the Vehicle and Operation Services Agency (VOSA) in Britain.

There were no physical changes or adaptations required to test centres. However, some changes to the vehicle testing software system were required, and a new trailer socket testing device was required at each centre.

DVA is currently in a position to implement the requirements of the Directive in accordance with the implementation timetable outlined above.

The total costs incurred by DVA have been around £7,000.

Planning Policy Statement 18

Mr Storey asked the Minister of the Environment, following his confirmation that PPS 21 will be given significant weight in a lignite area, whether PPS 18 will be interpreted in the same area.

(AQW 6177/11-15)

Mr Attwood: PPS18 is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications for renewable energy. Policies contained in the Area Plans are also material considerations and the weight that is attributed to policies is a matter of judgement for the Department depending on the merits of the case.

I have not made any commitment that PPS18 will be given significant weight for renewable energy planning applications in the Ballymoney Lignite Resource Area.

Hydraulic Fracturing: Water Testing in Fermanagh

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, prior to fracking in Fermanagh in the early 2000s, whether any baseline samples were taken for water purity/contamination, and if so, (a) who tested the samples; (b) where the samples were taken; (c) whether the sampled water was surface or ground water; (d) when the samples were taken; (e) for what the water was tested; and (f) to provide details of the results.

(AQW 6198/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Routine water quality monitoring of surface waters and groundwaters was undertaken during the period 2000-2005 by Northern Ireland Environment Agency's predecessor, the Environment and Heritage Service (EHS). Monitoring was carried out to meet a range of national and European classification schemes and Directives. These included the General Quality Assessment (GQA) Scheme for Chemistry and Biology, EC Directive 'On the Quality of Freshwaters to Support Fish Life' 78/659/EEC (known as the Freshwater Fish Directive); Dangerous Substances Directive (76/464/EEC,) Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC), the Nitrates Directive (91/676/EC) and the Groundwater Directive (80/68/EC).

I have provided answers to your additional questions below, using the lettering sequence set out in your question:

- (a) The majority of surface water samples were analysed by EHS Water Management Unit laboratories in Lisburn, although some specialist analyses were contracted out to Environment Agency (England & Wales) Laboratory Service. EHS Water Management Unit contracted White Young Green (WYG) to collect and analyse samples of groundwater in the period 2000 to 2006. The analysis was sub-contracted by WYG to Alcontrol laboratories in Yorkshire.
- (b & c) In total over one hundred surface water sites were monitored in Fermanagh. Details and locations are provided (Annex 1). There were five groundwater monitoring points at:
- Newtownbutler (244570E, 326010N)
 - Ballinamallard (224050E, 351470N)
 - Marble Arch (212210E, 335050N)
 - Larganacarran (217320E, 329580N)
 - Derrylin (228100E, 321960N)

- (d) Surface water sites were analysed for a range of physical, chemical and biological parameters (Annex 2). The groundwater samples were analysed for around 200 different parameters (Annex 3) consisting of:
- Major ions and nutrients sampled quarterly;
 - Metals, pesticides and hydrocarbons sampled annually;
 - Microbiological indicators sampled twice per year.
- (e) The combined monitoring programmes above represent an extensive data set of tens of thousands of data points which prohibits the inclusion of the results in this format. NIEA officials will be willing to provide the results of these programmes in entirety or on a selective basis as best meets your needs. If you wish to pursue this, please provide a further request detailing the locations, parameters, and time period for which you require the data.

ANNEX 1 – LOCATION AND DETAILS OF SURFACE WATER MONITORING IN FERMANAGH 2000-2005

Location	Irish Grid Ref	Dsd & Ospar	Dsd & Ospar Freq.	Ffd	Ffd Freq	Gqa Chem	Gqa Chem Freq.	Gqa Biol	Gqa Biol Freq.	Macro-phytes	Macro-phytes Survey Year
Roogagh River At Garrison	G942518			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Lough Melvin At Muckenagh Bay	G917543			✓	monthly						
Lough Melvin From B53 Road South of Garrison	G938513			✓	monthly						
County River (Fermanagh) At County Bridge	G938508			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Blackslee Burn At Holme Bay	H109572							✓	spring	✓	2002
Hollow River At Lisnarrick	H198589							✓	spring	✓	2002
Erne River At Roscor Viaduct	G987586		✓	✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Garvary River At Larkhill	H009630			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Lower Lough Erne At Rossharbour (Tullyfad)	H031617			✓	monthly						
Waterfoot River At Letter Bridge	H085652			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		

Location	Irish Grid Ref	Dsd & Ospar	Dsd & Ospar Freq.	Ffd	Ffd Freq	Gqa Chem	Gqa Chem Freq.	Gqa Biol	Gqa Biol Freq.	Macro-phytes	Macro-phytes Survey Year
Lower Lough Erne At Rosslare	H186544		✓	monthly							
Lower Lough Erne At Devenish	H226480		✓	monthly							
Lower Lough Erne At Portora	H223454		✓	monthly							
Erne River At Enniskillen	H231443		✓	monthly	✓	monthly	spring & autumn				
Upper Lough Erne At Killyhevin	H247421		✓	monthly							
Upper Lough Erne At Lady Craigavon Bridge	H330279		✓	monthly							
Lough-A-Hache River Below Moorlough	H374307		✓	monthly	✓	monthly	spring & autumn			✓	2002
Upper Lough Erne At Killard	H354261		✓	monthly							
Upper Lough Erne At Derryvore	H355238		✓	monthly							
Newtownbutler River At Newtownbutler	H418259		✓	monthly	✓	monthly	spring & autumn			✓	2002
Upper Lough Erne At Lady Brooke Bridge	H319273		✓	monthly							

Location	Irish Grid Ref	Dsd & Ospar	Dsd & Ospar Freq.	Ffd	Ffd Freq	Gqa Chem	Gqa Chem Freq.	Gqa Biol	Gqa Biol Freq.	Macro-phytes	Macro-phytes Survey Year
Upper Lough Erne At Corraslee	H279314			✓	monthly						
Termon River At Tullyhommon	H110667			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn	✓	2002
Bannagh River (Rotten Mountain) At Derrynevee Bridge	H186678					✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn	✓	2002
Bannagh River At Bannagh Bridge	H162654			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Drumnagreshial Trib At Drumnagreshial	H181682			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn	✓	2002
Mantlin River At Mantlin Bridge	H184635			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn	✓	2002
Lack River At Croneen	H256665					✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn	✓	2002
Drumboarty River At Drumboarty	H233668							✓	spring	✓	2002
Coolaghty River At Coolaghty	H257673					✓	monthly	✓	spring	✓	2002
Kesh River At Kesh Bridge	H180639			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Glendurragh River At Ederny Bridge	H222652							✓	spring & autumn		

Location	Irish Grid Ref	Dsd & Ospar	Dsd & Ospar Freq.	Ffd	Ffd Freq	Gqa Chem	Gqa Chem Freq.	Gqa Biol	Gqa Biol Freq.	Macro-phytes	Macro-phytes Survey Year
Glendurragh River At Edenamohill	H244664			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn	✓	2002
Doora Tributary At Letterkeen	H182645			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn	✓	2002
Doora Tributary At Killygarry Bridge	H205663			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn	✓	2002
Edenclaw Tributary At Edenclaw	H232654			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Salry River At Salry	H256515							✓	spring		
Tullyrain River At Magheracross	H289541							✓	spring		
Trillick Tributary At Bohee	H333554			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Ballinamallard River At Ballinapaste Bridge	H307578			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Foxhill Burn At Drumcreen	H279529					✓	monthly	✓	spring		
Kiliskerry Burn At Kiliskerry	H296548					✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Ballinamallard River At Ballycassidy Bridge	H228507			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		

Location	Irish Grid Ref	Dsd & Ospar	Dsd & Ospar Freq.	Ffd	Ffd Freq	Gqa Chem	Gqa Chem Freq.	Gqa Biol	Gqa Biol Freq.	Macro-phytes	Macro-phytes Survey Year
Ballinamallard River At Magheracross Bridge	H281537			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Ballycassidy River At Tullyclea Bridge	H236530			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Ballycassidy River At Necarne	H230565			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Trillick Tributary At Carran Bridge	H310566			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Raw River At Raw Bridge	H424426					✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Cooneen Water At Legatillida	H455396					✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Cleen River At Kiltermon Bridge	H475482			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Ramult Burn At Ramult	H415464					✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Coolcran Burn At Tattinweer	H363493					✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Pubble Burn At Pubble Bridge	H342463			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Aghavea River At Boyhill	H355389					✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		

Location	Irish Grid Ref	Dsd & Ospar	Dsd & Ospar Freq.	Ffd	Ffd Freq	Gqa Chem	Gqa Chem Freq.	Gqa Biol	Gqa Biol Freq.	Macro-phytes	Macro-phytes Survey Year
Lisnabane Burn At Lisnabane Bridge	H379447					✓	monthly	✓	spring		
Drumlught River At Drumlught	H346346							✓	spring		
Hollybrook River At Aghalurcher	H363311			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn	✓	2002
Colebrooke River At Ballindarragh Bridge	H331360			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Colebrooke River At Tullyreagh Bridge	H378441			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Colebrooke River At Pollboy Bridge	H445434			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Tempo River At A4 Road Bridge	H342392			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Tempo River At Tattinweer Bridge	H363492			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Many Burnes River At Manyburns Bridge	H384474			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Cleen River At Corralongford	H428453			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Crockada River At Derrywolan	H545356							✓	spring	✓	2002

Location	Irish Grid Ref	Dsd & Ospar	Dsd & Ospar Freq.	Ffd	Ffd Freq	Gqa Chem	Gqa Chem Freq.	Gqa Biol	Gqa Biol Freq.	Macro-phytes	Macro-phytes Survey Year
Lough Tawy River At Crinash	H531371							✓	spring	✓	2002
Killylacky River Above Rose Lough	H505305							✓	spring	✓	2002
Drumshancorick River At Deer Park	H543337					✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn	✓	2002
Bunlougher Burn At Bruscaragh	H518364			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring	✓	2002
Finn (Erne) River At Wattle Bridge	H425203			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Finn (Erne) River At Ballyhoe Bridge	H464203			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn	✓	2002
Finn (Erne) River At Rosslea	H537325			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn	✓	2002
Lackey River At Carra Old Bridge	H485237			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn	✓	2002
Lackey River At Knockballymore	H482272							✓	spring & autumn	✓	2002
Woodford River At Aghalane	H342194			✓	monthly	✓	monthly				
Swanlinbar River At Thompsons Bridge	H253313			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		

Location	Irish Grid Ref	Dsd & Ospar	Dsd & Ospar Freq.	Ffd	Ffd Freq	Gqa Chem	Gqa Chem Freq.	Gqa Biol	Gqa Biol Freq.	Macro-phytes	Macro-phytes Survey Year
Arney River At Drumane Bridge	H236367			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn	✓	2002
Arney River At Brockagh Bridge	H175375			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Lower Lough Macnean At Ulster Way Footbridge	H131376			✓	monthly						
Lower Lough Macnean At Cushrusheen	H128375			✓	monthly						
Belcoo River At Belcoo Bridge	H083384			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn	✓	2002
Upper Lough Macnean At Carrickduff	H040408			✓	monthly						
Black River At B52 Road Bridge	H019435			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Cladagh River At Gorteen	H132367			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Sillees River At Drumkeen New Bridge	H230413			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Sillees River At Thompsons Bridge	H181448			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn	✓	2002

Location	Irish Grid Ref	Dsd & Ospar	Dsd & Ospar Freq.	Ffd	Ffd Freq	Gqa Chem	Gqa Chem Freq.	Gqa Biol	Gqa Biol Freq.	Macro-phytes	Macro-phytes Survey Year
Sillees River At Carr Bridge	H130471			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Sillees River At Derrygonnelly Bridge	H118521			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn	✓	2002
Boho Tributary At Boho	H134445			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn	✓	2002
Screenagh River At Aghakeeran	H108492			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn	✓	2002
Moher River At Corry Bridge	H234307							✓	spring	✓	2002
Owengarr River At Glasdrumman Bridge	H226287			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn	✓	2002
Drumersee Burn At Gortoral Bridge	H206276					✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Florencecourt River At A32 Road Bridge	H194355			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn	✓	2002
Lurgan River At Belcoo	H081392			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Lisblake Burn At Brockagh	H169373					✓	monthly	✓	spring	✓	2002
Blunnick Burn At Blunnick	H152370							✓	spring	✓	2002

Location	Irish Grid Ref	Dsd & Ospar	Dsd & Ospar Freq.	Ffd	Ffd Freq	Gqa Chem	Gqa Chem Freq.	Gqa Biol	Gqa Biol Freq.	Macro-phytes	Macro-phytes Survey Year
Drumharriff Burn At Knocknafadeela	H125385							✓	spring	✓	2002
Drumhack River At A509 Road Bridge	H235355							✓	spring	✓	2002
Killycat Burn At Killycat Bridge	H176448							✓	spring	✓	2002
Lattone Tributary At Lattone Bridge	H001457			✓	monthly	✓	monthly	✓	spring & autumn		
Tamlaght Tributary At Tamlaght Bridge	H271411			✓	monthly	✓	monthly				
Starraghen Tributary At Starraghen Bridge	H415226			✓	monthly	✓	monthly				
Derryhooly Tributary At Cory	H310212			✓	monthly	✓	monthly				
Sillees River At Dresternan Bridge	H086546			✓	monthly	✓	monthly				
Owenbreen River Above Monastir Gorge	H118329			✓	monthly	✓	monthly				
Pollasumera River At Mculnulty's Lane	H133332			✓	monthly	✓	monthly				
Lough-A-Hache River At Derryany Bridge	H370283			✓	monthly	✓	monthly				

Location	Irish Grid Ref	Dsd & Ospar	Dsd & Ospar Freq.	Ffd	Ffd Freq	Gqa Chem	Gqa Chem Freq.	Gqa Biol	Gqa Biol Freq.	Macro-phytes	Macro-phytes Survey Year
Tempo River At Imeroo	H372505			✓	monthly	✓	monthly				
Cooneen Water At Grogey Bridge	H449428			✓	monthly	✓	monthly				
Killylacky River At Lacky Bridge	H495288			✓	monthly	✓	monthly				
Castlehume Lough West From Road	H192501			✓	monthly						
Lough Scolban East Lough Jetties	H005612			✓	monthly						
Derryhooly Tributary At Derrylaney	H302224							✓	spring & autumn		

ANNEX 2 SURFACE WATER MONITORING DETERMINANDS FOR THE FRESHWATER FISH DIRECTIVE AND GQA

Determinand	Units	FFD	GQA CHEM	GQA BIOL
Ammoniacal nitrogen	mg/L	✓	✓	
Biochemical oxygen demand	mg/L	✓	✓	
Conductivity	uS/cm	✓	✓	
Copper, dissolved	mg/L	✓		
Dissolved oxygen	mg/L	✓	✓	
Dissolved oxygen % saturation	%	✓	✓	
Nitrate	mg/L	✓	✓	
Nitrite	mg/L	✓	✓	
Non-ionised ammonia (calc by wqa from NH ₄)	mg/L	✓		
Petroleum hydrocarbons (field measurement)	n/a	✓	✓	
pH value	n/a	✓	✓	
Soluble reactive phosphorus	mg/L	✓	✓	
Suspended solids	mg/L	✓		
Temperature (field measurement)	toC	✓	✓	
Total hardness	mg/L	✓		
Total oxidised nitrogen	mg/L	✓	✓	
Water level (field measurement)	n/a	✓	✓	
Zinc, total	mg/L	✓		
Average Score per Taxa	n/a			✓
Biotic Score	n/a			✓
No. of Taxa	n/a			✓

Note: A wide range of organic and metals were also monitored under OSPAR and the Dangerous Substances Directive

ANNEX 3 GROUNDWATER MONITORING PARAMETERS 2000 – 2006

Parameter	Units
pH_field	pH units
Temperature	oC
DO1_field	%
DO2_field	ppm
Eh_field	mV
EC_field	µS/cm
Ammonia_field	mg/l NH ₃ _N

Parameter	Units
Alkalinity_field	mg/l CaCO ₃
Nitrite_field	mg/l
Cyanide_field	mg/l
Total viable counts (22°C)	cfu / ml
Total viable counts (37°C)	cfu / ml
Total Coli	cfu / 100ml
Faecal Coli	cfu / 100ml
EC_lab	µS/cm
pH_lab	pH units
Hardness Total	mg/l Ca
Alkalinity Total	mg/l HCO ₃
Calcium	mg/l Ca
Magnesium	mg/l Mg
Sodium	mg/l Na
Potassium	mg/l K
Chloride	mg/l Cl
Sulphate	mg/l SO ₄
Nitrate	mg/l NO ₃
Nitrite	mg/l NO ₂
Iron	µg/l Fe
Manganese	µg/l Mn
Total Organic Carbon	mg/l C
Nitrogen Ammoniacal	mg/l NH ₄
Aluminium	µg/l Al
Antimony	µg/l Sb
Arsenic	µg/l As
Barium	µg/l Ba
Beryllium	mg/l Be
Boron	µg/l B
Cadmium	µg/l Cd
Chromium	µg/l Cr
Cobalt	mg/l Co
Copper	µg/l Cu
Cyanide (total)	mg/l CN

Parameter	Units
Hydrocarbons	mg/l
Fluoride	µg/l F
Lead	µg/l Pb
Mercury	µg/l Hg
Molybdenum	mg/l Mo
Nickel	µg/l Ni
Phosphorus	µg/l P
Tellurium	µg/l
Thallium	µg/l Tl
Titanium	µg/l Ti
Selenium	µg/l Se
Silica	mg/l SiO ₂
Silver	µg/l Ag
Uranium	µg/l
Vanadium	µg/l
Zinc	µg/l Zn
Dichlorobromomethane	µg/l
Dibromochloromethane	µg/l
Tetrachloromethane	µg/l
Trichloroethene	µg/l
Tetrachloroethene	µg/l
1, 1, 1 Trichloroethane	µg/l
Trichloromethane	µg/l
Tribromomethane	µg/l
Trihalomethanes - total	µg/l
Benzene	µg/l
Toluene	µg/l
m,p-Xylene	µg/l
O-Xylene	µg/l
Ethylbenzene	µg/l
Methyl-tert.butyl-ether	µg/l
Fluoranthene	ng/l
Benzo 1,12, perylene	ng/l
Benzo 11,12 fluoranthene	ng/l

Parameter	Units
Indeno(1,2,3-cd)pyrene	ng/l
Benzo 3,4 fluoranthene	ng/l
Benzo 3,4 pyrene	ng/l
PAH	µg/l
Tributyl tin	µg/l
Triphenyl tin	µg/l
Pentachlorophenol	µg/l
Pentachlorophenol	µg/l
2-Chlorophenol	µg/l
4-Chlorophenol	µg/l
2,4-Dichlorophenol	µg/l
2,6-Dichlorophenol	µg/l
2,4,5-Trichlorophenol	µg/l
2,4,6-Trichlorophenol	µg/l
o-Creosol	µg/l
m-Creosol	µg/l
p-Creosol	µg/l
Phenol	µg/l
Diquat	µg/l
Glyphosphate	µg/l
Flumethrin	µg/l
Triadimefon	µg/l
Fluazifop-p-butyl	µg/l
Pendimethalin	µg/l
Bromacil	µg/l
DDD (op)	µg/l
DDE (op)	µg/l
Quintozene	µg/l
Propham	µg/l
Azinphos-methyl	µg/l
Bifenox	µg/l
Carbophenothion	µg/l
Chlorfenvinphos	µg/l
Cyanazine	µg/l

Parameter	Units
Desmetryne	µg/l
Diazinon	µg/l
Dichlorvos	µg/l
Coumaphos	µg/l
Fenitrothion	µg/l
Fenclorphos	µg/l
Fenpropidin	µg/l
Fenpropimorph	µg/l
Iprodione	µg/l
Malathion	µg/l
Oxadixyl	µg/l
Parathion	µg/l
Prometryne	µg/l
Propazine	µg/l
Propetamphos	µg/l
Propyzamide	µg/l
Terbutylazine	µg/l
Terbutryn	µg/l
Atrazine	µg/l
Chlorpyriphos	µg/l
Dichlorbenil	µg/l
EPTC	µg/l
Flutriafol	µg/l
Phosalone	µg/l
Propiconazole	µg/l
Simazine	µg/l
Dimethoate	µg/l
Triallate	µg/l
Triazophos	µg/l
Trietazine	µg/l
2,4-DB	µg/l
2,4-D	µg/l
2,4,5-T (acid)	µg/l
Bentazone	µg/l

Parameter	Units
Bromoxynil	µg/l
Clopyralid	µg/l
Dicamba	µg/l
Dichloroprop	µg/l
2,4,5-TP	µg/l
Fluoxypyr	µg/l
Imazapyr	µg/l
Ioxynil	µg/l
MCPA	µg/l
MCPB	µg/l
MCPP	µg/l
Triclopyr	µg/l
Carbetamide	µg/l
Chlorpropham	µg/l
Chlorotoluron	µg/l
Diuron	µg/l
Isoproturon	µg/l
Linuron	µg/l
Monuron	µg/l
Aldrin	µg/l
Chlordane	µg/l
Chlorothalonil	µg/l
TDE (pp)	µg/l
DDE (pp)	µg/l
DDT (op)	µg/l
DDT (pp)	µg/l
Dieldrin	µg/l
Endosulphan a	µg/l
Endosulphan b	µg/l
Endrin	µg/l
Hexachlorobenzene	µg/l
Hexachloro 1,3 butadiene	µg/l
HCH-alpha	µg/l
HCH-beta	µg/l

Parameter	Units
HCH-delta	µg/l
HCH-gamma	µg/l
Heptachlor	µg/l
Heptachlor epoxide	µg/l
Isodrin	µg/l
Methoxychlor	µg/l
Tecnazene	µg/l
Trifluralin	µg/l
Benzene (THM)	µg/l
1,2 Dichloroethane	µg/l
PCBs (7 Congeners)	µg/l
Cations (tot)	meq/l
Anions (tot)	meq/l
Ionic Balance	%
Cypermethrin	µg/l
PCB 28	
PCB 52	
PCB 101	
PCB 118	
PCB 138	
PCB153	
PCB180	
trans-Chlordane	
cis-Chlordane	
Heptachlor epoxide B	
Heptachlor epoxide A	
Cyanide (Total)	
Asulam	µg/l
E.Coli	cfu / 100ml

Wind Turbines: Planning Applications

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of planning applications for wind turbines over 24 metres in height (i) that have been (a) approved; (b) refused; and (c) withdrawn; and (ii) that are awaiting a decision, in each of the last three years, broken down by divisional planning office. **(AQW 6309/11-15)**

Mr Attwood: Due to the way information is recorded on the Planning Portal it is not always possible to determine the height of a wind turbine without a manual search of all the files. This is not only disproportionate in terms of time and cost but would result in un-validated statistics being released.

It is possible to provide statistics for all wind turbines that have been approved, refused and withdrawn in each Planning Office over the last 3 years. This is as follows:

Area Office	2008/09			2009/10			2010/11		
	App	Ref	W/D	App	Ref	W/D	App	Ref	W/D
Ballymena	28	2	7	22	2	5	12	1	6
Belfast	13	0	2	9	0	0	8	0	0
Craigavon	75	6	4	16	4	1	16	6	4
Downpatrick	46	1	0	20	5	7	4	3	3
HQ	8	0	3	7	5	2	8	0	8
Londonderry	30	4	2	19	1	1	44	5	9
Omagh	34	4	2	23	8	6	37	9	16
Total	234	17	20	116	25	22	129	24	46

The Department is currently processing 781 planning applications for wind turbines. This is broken down by Planning Office as follows:

Planning Office	No of Wind Turbine Applications – Awaiting A Decision
Ballymena	92
Belfast	42
Craigavon	100
Downpatrick	48
HQ	146
Londonderry	165
Omagh	188
Total	781

Planning is currently engaged in an ongoing exercise to cleanse and quality assure the data it holds on renewable energy applications. As such figures may be subject to revision.

Local Government: Transfer of Functions

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of the Environment, for each of the last five years, to detail the functions that (i) have been transferred; and (ii) are planned to be transferred from his Department to local councils, and of these, to detail (a) the reason behind the transfer of each function; (b) whether additional funding was offered to local councils to assist them in carrying out the functions; and (c) the cost, to his Department, of the final year when each of the functions were the responsibility of his Department; and (iii) may be transferred from his Department to local councils at a future date, **(AQW 6320/11-15)**

Mr Attwood: In respect of (i), there have been no departmental functions transferred to local councils in the last five years.

- (ii) The list of functions identified as being appropriate for transfer was agreed by the previous Executive and for DOE included aspects of local development planning, development control and enforcement, and some minor functions concerning the spot listing of buildings for protection purposes and the listing of buildings of architectural and historic interest.
- (iii) The future transfer of functions to local government goes back to the Executive objectives for the Review of Public Administration which sought to streamline public administration and delegate decision making powers to a local level.

However, I am considering further what functions may be transferred from DOE to local councils and I have been engaging with Executive colleagues to ensure we use this opportunity to place decision making powers where they are best discharged to ensure citizens receive the public services they deserve.

Taxi: Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment what percentage of private hire and public hire taxis (i) in Belfast; and (ii) outside Belfast will be fully wheelchair accessible under the new taxi regulations. **(AQW 6328/11-15)**

Mr Attwood: The proposed new taxi regulations provide for single tier taxi licensing which removes the distinction between private and public hire taxis. This means that all taxis will be able to be prebooked or to be hailed but only wheelchair accessible taxis will be able to stand at taxi ranks.

It is intended that the proposed regulations will come into operation in autumn 2012. The requirement that only wheelchair accessible taxis stand at taxi ranks will have immediate effect in Belfast. Outside Belfast this requirement will not apply until 2016.

In Belfast there are currently 502 wheelchair accessible taxis licensed to stand at ranks. As these vehicles will be able to work as they currently do it is likely that there will be little or no change in the number of wheelchair accessible taxis in Belfast.

Outside Belfast, there is no information on the numbers of wheelchair accessible taxis providing taxi services as there is no legislative requirement for them to be provided. However, the Department considers that the new legislation will lead to the greater provision of wheelchair accessible taxis outside Belfast.

The Department will monitor the provision of wheelchair accessible taxis throughout Northern Ireland to ensure that there is an adequate supply and will take action to address any shortfall that is identified. When taxi operator licensing is introduced the department will have the powers to require licensed operators to have a percentage of their fleet as wheelchair accessible.

Taxis: Central Station, Belfast

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment what action he is taking to ensure that private hire taxis at Central Station, Belfast, are operating within the law. **(AQW 6329/11-15)**

Mr Attwood: The Driver & Vehicle Agency regularly monitors the operation of private and public hire taxis operating from Central Station, utilising both plain clothed and uniformed enforcement officers.

During the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 one private hire taxi was detected collecting passengers without a pre booking from Central Station, and that resulted in the offending driver being issued with a fixed penalty notice. Details of the licensing infringement were drawn to the attention of Translink, who raised the matter with their contracted taxi provider.

DVA and DRD officials also meet with Translink representatives from time to time to discuss the regulation of taxis at Central Station. Currently being considered is the possibility of introducing a fixed

camera system to assist with the enforcement of bus lane restrictions on East Bridge Street. Such a system would not only enhance road safety but also deter Belfast public hire taxi operators from parking taxis illegally in the bus lane in order to tout for business.

Hydraulic Fracturing: Fermanagh Waterways

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the potential impact of hydraulic fracturing on the pollution of the waterways in Fermanagh.

(AQW 6346/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) seeks to safeguard the quality of the environment as a whole through effective regulation of activities that have the potential to impact on the environment. Hydraulic fracturing (fracking) is considered by the Agency to be such an activity.

NIEA is continuing to supplement its knowledge of the process through reviewing emerging research, studying case studies from other parts of the world and liaising with counterparts in other Environment Agencies in Britain and Ireland, and other countries where fracking is currently proposed or taking place. It is intended that research may be taken forward and funded on a North/South basis.

I am currently assessing what environmental assessments are or are not required at each stage going forward, including pre-exploratory drilling. However, I repeat that any planning or environmental requirements at any and all stages will be faithfully fulfilled.

Taxis: Licences in North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how many people in the North Down area currently hold a taxi licence.

(AQW 6354/11-15)

Mr Attwood: At 17 January 2012 there were 1,086 licensed taxi drivers in the North Down area.

Councils: Debt

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 5494/11-15, whether existing council debt will be taken on by super-councils when councils are amalgamated under the Review of Public Administration; and (ii) whether there is a statutory obligation on rate payers to discharge the debts accumulated in another council area when amalgamation takes place.

(AQW 6369/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In preparation for the reform of local government, work had been undertaken to develop a statutory transfer scheme to allow for the transfer of the assets and liabilities (including debt) of each of the 26 councils into the new 11 council structure.

There is no statutory obligation on individual rate payers to discharge the debts of the council area in which they live. Debts are a liability of councils as corporate entities.

However if a council was to increase its rates to meet the servicing costs of its debt, or was to divert rates income from other services for the same purpose, then individual rate payers may be affected indirectly by the debt holdings of a council.

Local Government: 15-council Model

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment whether he intends to carry out an economic appraisal of the 15 council model.

(AQW 6382/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In November 2011, the Executive decided that the reform of local government would be delivered under an 11 council model. I will be working to refresh the existing 2009 economic appraisal on the costs and benefits of local government reform.

Unless the Executive is willing to reconsider its decision based on the strength of argument, specifically in relation to my own alternative proposal for a 15 council structure, there appears little value in the Department interrogating the economics behind the 15 model, whatever its strength, quality and attractions. I will look at the issue further.

Northern Area Plan: Moyle

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment why the Planning Service made a statement for Objection 4827 1.30 Moyle Area Draft Northern Area Plan to the Planning Appeals Commission on 14 November 2011, stating that the garden of a dwelling at 22 Drumavoley Road, Ballycastle, was a field, when the Planning Service already had information, including a Certificate of Lawfulness, stating that it is not a field. **(AQW 6391/11-15)**

Mr Attwood: The Planning Appeals Commission at the request of the Department is holding an Independent Examination to hear objections to the Draft Northern Area Plan 2016. There is an objection to the inclusion of lands at the rear of 16 - 22 Drumavoley Road (including 22) within a local landscape policy area and exclusion from the settlement limit, and that this is a matter to be addressed at the Independent Examination.

In the question it is suggested that the Department has referred to land to the rear of 22 Drumavoley Road as a field rather than a garden. I have looked carefully at the submission. The land is not described as a field, but rather, as highlighted below, reference is made to field boundaries (Department's Statement Topic M14, paragraph 1.30): -

Issue xv - Objection to the inclusion of lands to the rear of 16-22 Dumavoley Road including No.22 to within LLPA BEL 02 (NAP/4827/4) (word count 118)

1.30 This objection refers to lands identified by omission site NAP/4827/4. The omission site lies on the lower valley slope of the Glenshesk River which is included in LLPA BEL02 in recognition of the contribution the landform makes to the views and setting of this important environmental asset and the settlement contained on the ridgeline above the flood plain. The field boundaries are well vegetated adding to the overall treed character of the area. Development would extend built form down the hill into the distinctive river valley landscape to the south-east of the town and impact on the setting of the town and the river corridor. The omission lands should remain part of the LLPA designation, outside the SDL.

I understand that in making this statement the Department has used the term field boundaries to describe the delineation of the landform and associated features. Whilst I fully accept that the land is a garden as detailed in AQ and the importance the owner attaches to this, it should be remembered that these boundaries also neighbour three agricultural fields. I am also aware that the Area Planning Office has apologised for use of the term "field boundaries" and will ensure that the Planning Appeals Commission will be made fully aware of the Certificate of Lawfulness for the use of the land as a garden. This to my mind is an appropriate remedy, bearing in mind of course that the land owner retains the right to present their views at the Independent Examination. In my view, this is an entirely appropriate response from the Planning Service and I support their actions.

Genmar Companion: Oil Removal

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment why it took so long to remove oil from the Genmar Companion. **(AQW 6400/11-15)**

Mr Attwood: The process of removing the cargo (vacuum gas oil) of the Genmar Companion was managed by the Secretary of State's Representative for Maritime Salvage and Intervention (SOSREP). I am satisfied that SOSREP managed the operation to ensure that the cargo was removed at the earliest possible opportunity. I was kept informed throughout the incident and understand that the limiting factors were

- Identifying a suitable contractor, receiving vessel and equipment to complete the ship to ship transfer and
- The extreme weather which hampered the both passage of the receiving vessel and then the start of operation itself.

I believe that all involved should be acknowledged and thanked. A difficult situation was managed without threat to people or animals or environment. No undue risks were taken and my Department were active in protecting the Northern Ireland interest.

Genmar Companion: Anchorage

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment why the Genmar Companion was allowed to shelter at the Copeland Islands rather than being brought into Belfast Harbour.

(AQW 6401/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The decision to allow the Genmar Companion to shelter off Belfast Lough was taken by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), an Executive Agency of the UK Department of Transport. The MCA is responsible for maritime safety, which is a reserved matter. The most appropriate anchorage was agreed between the master of the Genmar Companion, the MCA and Belfast Harbour Office. My understanding of the situation is that the Genmar Companion could not shelter within Belfast Harbour because the draft of the vessel was 12 metres when the ship was fully laden. The dredged depth of Belfast Harbour is 9.1 metres. Now that the cargo has been removed, I have been informed that the vessel has been moved to a safe anchorage within Belfast Harbour limits.

Northern Area Plan: Moyle

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will investigate the allegations of discrimination made by residents of Drumavoley Road, Ballycastle, since 2009, after Planning Service made a false statement to the Planning Appeals Commission on 14 November 2011 in relation to Objection 4827 1.30 Moyle Area Draft Northern Area Plan.

(AQW 6440/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I have reviewed this matter. I am satisfied that the Department's staff have acted in a professional manner. I have found no evidence of discrimination to the residents of Drumavoley Road.

Planning Application E/2009/0303/0

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment, in light of the Planning Appeals Commission decision of March 2011, relating to Application E/2009/0303/0, how many times the Planning Service has (i) verbally; and (ii) in documentation referred to the land as a 'field' instead of a 'domestic garden', as it is referred to in the Lawful Development Certificate.

(AQW 6443/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department has no records, nor would it be appropriate to keep records, of the number of times a specific word is spoken or written in the context of your query.

As outlined in the response to AQW 6444/11-15, your constituent has in his possession a Lawful Development Certificate issued by the Department confirming that the subject land is a garden. The Department does not retain records of the number of times the Planning Service has 'verbally' used the words referred to and I will not be asking the Service to do so. In addition, I consider that it would be an unreasonable drain on resources for the service to go through correspondence to identify the use of the words referred to. I confirm that I will not be asking that the Service does so.

Noise Complaints

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how many complaints about noise each council area received in 2011.

(AQW 6447/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department of the Environment collates statistics and publishes an annual report on the numbers and types of noise complaints received by each district council. Councils record noise complaints on a financial year basis (1 April to 31 March) and as such, figures are not available for any individual calendar year.

Detailed information on all complaints received by the district councils for the period 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011 can be found in the Department's Noise Complaint Statistics for Northern Ireland 2010 – 2011 report which is available at:

http://www.doeni.gov.uk/noise_complaint_statistics_for_northern_ireland_2010-11.pdf

Statistics for the period 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012 should be published by the Department in autumn 2012.

Littering: Fines

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how many fines for littering were imposed in each council area in 2011.

(AQW 6449/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department gathers information from councils, on the numbers of fixed penalty notices imposed for littering offences, on a financial rather than a calendar year. The figures for the period 1st April 2011 to 31st March 2012 will not, therefore, be available until the verified figures are produced in August 2012.

Information on the number of fixed penalty notices imposed by councils in the 2010/11 financial year is set out in the table below.

STATISTICAL RETURNS FOR LITTER 2010/2011

District Council	Number of Fixed Penalty Notices issued
Antrim Borough Council	23
Ards Borough Council	7
Armagh City & District Council	34
Ballymena Borough Council	73
Ballymoney Borough Council	6
Banbridge District Council	11
Belfast City Council	1995
Carrickfergus Borough Council	16
Castlereagh Borough Council	38
Coleraine Borough Council	53
Cookstown District Council	13
Craigavon Borough Council	1038
Derry City Council	56

District Council	Number of Fixed Penalty Notices issued
Down District Council	51
Dungannon & South Tyrone	14
Fermanagh District Council	16
Larne Borough Council	73
Limavady Borough Council	6
Lisburn City Council	80
Magherafelt District Council	39
Moyle District Council	7
Newry & Mourne District Council	167
Newtownabbey Borough Council	48
North Down Borough Council	8
Omagh District Council	35
Strabane District Council	23
Total	3930

Driver and Vehicle Agency: Mobile Units

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment how many mobile Driver and Vehicle Agency units were operating on 26 December 2011, to detect car tax default.

(AQW 6451/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Vehicle licensing is an excepted matter for which responsibility rests with the Secretary of State for Transport. It is administered here by the Driver & Vehicle Agency under the terms of a formal agreement between my Department and the Department for Transport.

On 26 December 2011 the Driver and Vehicle Agency had 3 mobile units in operation to detect unlicensed vehicles.

Trade Unions: Funding

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the level of funding his Department allocated to each trade union in the (i) 2000/01; (ii) 2005/06; and (iii) 2010/11 financial years.

(AQW 6466/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department does not allocate funding to trade union organisations. However, it does pay the salary costs of employees who are released on fulltime secondment to a recognised trade union.

For 2010/11 two employees were released to undertake trade union work at a total cost of £57,833. During 2000/01 and 2005/06 DOE did not second any staff to trade unions. However, for these two years the Department for Regional Development seconded staff to a recognised trade union who in turn provided a trade union service to that Department, the Department of the Environment and the Department for Culture Arts and Leisure under a agreed shared service arrangement for the provision of personnel services. However, it is not possible to apportion these costs between the three departments for the two years 2000/01 and 2005/06.

Civil Servants from the Foyle Constituency who Work in Greater Belfast

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the total number of civil servants in his Department, who live in the Foyle constituency and travel to work in the Greater Belfast area; and the total cost to his Department for subsidising the travel.

(AQW 6471/11-15)

Mr Attwood: At 1 January 2011, 15 DOE staff were making the journey from the Foyle constituency to work in the Greater Belfast area. Of these staff, 3 have claimed excess fares at a total cost of £5,893.50 over the period 1 January to 31 December 2011.

Wind Farms: Planning Applications

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the number of planning applications for commercial wind farms that are awaiting approval; and (ii) the number of planning applications that have been approved but the wind farms have not yet been built.

(AQW 6478/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

- (i) There are currently 46 planning applications for wind farms awaiting decisions.
- (ii) There are 28 planning approvals for wind farms which have not yet been built.

Planning Applications G/2011/0041/F and G/2011/0162/F

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to planning applications G/2011/0041/F and G/2011/0162/F, how many times the applicants have resubmitted or amended their applications; and what mechanisms are in place to curb repeat attempts to circumvent objections.

(AQW 6479/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Planning application G/2011/0041/F (Elginny Hill) was preceded by planning application G/2006/0754/F. Planning application G/2006/0754/F was withdrawn by the applicant following one amendment to the original proposal.

Planning application G/2011/0162/F (Rathsherry) was preceded by planning application G/2006/0840/F. Planning application G/2006/0840/F was withdrawn by the applicant following one amendment to the original proposal.

Wind farm planning applications are accompanied by environmental statements. Consequently the Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (NI) 1999 (as amended) apply. The Regulations provide a formal mechanism through which the Department is able to put in place deadlines for the submission of further environmental information/amendments/responses to objections. It also provides the mechanism by which the Department is able to determine when it has in its possession sufficient information to allow the application to be determined.

Brown Bins

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the district councils which distribute brown bins for the collection of organic waste; and, the methods used by each council to dispose of such waste.

(AQW 6485/11-15)

Mr Attwood: 22 Councils distribute brown bins for the collection of organic waste. Coleraine, Derry, Strabane and Fermanagh do not currently distribute brown bins. However, Coleraine Borough Council will commence a roll-out programme of brown bins to households in 2012/13, and Derry City Council is planning to commence a roll-out programme in 2013/14.

The majority of the organic waste collected by the councils is forwarded to Natural World Products for in-vessel composting. Household organic waste collected by Ballymoney, Limavady, and Moyle councils is treated by 'windrow' composting facilities operated by Coleraine Borough Council.

The attached table lists the councils, the number of households within each council area, the number of households with a brown bin, and the onward methods employed by each to dispose of organic waste. It also details whether food waste is permitted for inclusion within the brown bin and also if food caddies are supplied in lieu of a brown bin.

List of Councils which distribute brown bins for the collection of organic waste and the methods used to dispose of such waste.

(The information has been supplied by arc21, NWRWMG and SWaMP 2008 waste management groups)

Council	Total No. of Households in Council area	Number of Households with an organics "brown bin" collection service for organic waste. ['Combined' refers to brown bin collections that accept garden and food waste]	Onward methods of treatment/disposal
arc21			
Antrim	20811	17594 combined (plus 3115 food caddies)	In vessel-composting - NWP
Ards	33733	26464 combined	In vessel-composting - NWP
Ballymena	25399	20000 combined	In vessel-composting - NWP
Belfast	126872	59000 combined (plus 9000 food caddies)	In vessel-composting - NWP
Carrickfergus	16265	16249 combined	In vessel-composting - NWP
Castlereagh	28812	23414 combination (plus 1100 food caddies)	In vessel-composting - NWP
Down	27900	16800 garden waste only	In vessel-composting - NWP
Larne	14196	13783 combined	In vessel-composting - NWP
Lisburn	47920	46220 combined	In vessel-composting - NWP
Newtownabbey	35401	33300 combination (plus 1750 food caddies)	In vessel-composting - NWP
North Down	34616	26000 combined	In vessel-composting - NWP
Total	411925	16800 garden waste only 282024 combined 51765 food caddies	
NWRWMG			
Ballymoney	12149	7112 garden waste only	Windrow composting - Coleraine Borough Council
Coleraine	27220	Nil	N/A
Derry	40114	Nil	N/A
Limavady	12728	8957 garden waste only	Windrow composting - Coleraine Borough Council
Magherafelt	16074	16074 combined	In vessel - Composting , NWP

Council	Total No. of Households in Council area	Number of Households with an organics “brown bin” collection service for organic waste. [‘Combined’ refers to brown bin collections that accept garden and food waste]	Onward methods of treatment/disposal
Moyle	7747	5000 garden waste only	Windrow composting - Coleraine Borough Council
Strabane	15411	Nil	N/A
Total	131443	21069 garden waste only 16074 combined	
SWaMP 2008			
Armagh	22134	15520 combined	In vessel-composting - NWP
Banbridge	19165	18644 combined	In vessel-composting - NWP
Cookstown	13472	6250 combined	In vessel-composting - NWP
Craigavon	37779	19300 combined	In vessel-composting - NWP
Dungannon	20862	12422 combined	In vessel-composting - NWP
Fermanagh	26315	Nil	N/A
Newry	35032	10300 combined	In vessel-composting - NWP
Omagh	19863	7100 combined	In vessel-composting - NWP
Total	194,622	89,536 combined	

Local Government: Reform

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what action is being taken to ensure that the work already undertaken by (i) the Strategic Leadership Board; and (ii) policy development panels will be utilised in the Reform of Local Government.

(AQW 6492/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The work of the Strategic Leadership Board, and the three Policy Development Panels which supported it, was of key importance in developing policy and implementation proposals on a wide range of local government reform issues.

This is valuable work which continues to be utilised. Indeed, the proposals contained in the Local Government Reform Policy Proposals Consultation Document, published on 30th November 2010, reflected significantly the work of the Board and its Panels. The drafting of the proposed Local Government (Reorganisation) Bill will be based on these proposals, taking account of my consideration of issues raised in the consultation.

Therefore, in moving forward, the Department will continue to utilise the work of the previous Board, and its Panels, in the reform of local government.

Coastline: ASSI Designation

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment how he ensures that areas of the shoreline, which are not currently under the direct remit of an Executive Department, are adequately protected.

(AQW 6552/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland coastline stretches for over 650 kilometres and there are 10730 hectares of shore lying between the High and Low water marks.

In relation to nature conservation, 9769 hectares or over 91% is designated as Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs). The designations cover a number of habitats such as, mudflats, sand dunes or geological features etc.

The Department's ASSI designation programme is ongoing so there is potential for further stretches of the shoreline to be protected, depending on features present. In addition, I intend to take forward a specific marine nature conservation powers under the proposed Marine Bill. This new designation process also has the potential to include additional areas of shoreline. I would also wish to see the establishment of a Marine Management organisation as the best model to protect and proactively develop the marine environment.

Dangerous Structures and Places Policy: Belfast City Council

Mr Craig asked the Minister of the Environment (i) for his assessment of Belfast City Council's Dangerous Structures and Places Policy; and what legislation is in place to enable other local councils to renovate or redevelop dangerous commercial properties to prevent potential health and safety risks. **(AQW 6632/11-15)**

Mr Attwood: Belfast City Council's Dangerous Structures and Places Policy describes clearly and concisely how the Council will discharge its duty to protect members of the public from buildings, parts of buildings or other structures within the Council area which pose a structural threat.

The policy document lists the legislative powers available, the council's objectives and principles for enforcement and sets out the process the Council will follow to require an owner to complete necessary remedial work. The Council can carry out these works itself if the owner is unknown.

Belfast City Council can call on a number of powers that are unique to its council area under the Belfast Improvement Act 1878 and the Belfast Corporation Act 1911, but other powers are also available to all councils that allow them to deal with dangerous or ruinous structures.

These are primarily articles 65 and 66 of the Pollution Control and Local Government Order 1978, section 75 of the Town Improvements (Ireland) Act 1854, sections 107 – 127 of the Public Health (Ireland) Act 1878 and section 1 of the Public Health and Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 1962 which applies section 30 of the Public Health Acts Amendment Act 1907.

I have been impressed by the BCC publication and its application. I am considering how councils – in areas like Portstewart and Portrush – could fully utilise these powers and held a Blight Summit on this issue in the early Autumn 2011. This work is important, not least the need to grow tourism generally and the Irish Open in particular.

Planning: Enforcement Action in Lisburn

Mr Craig asked the Minister of the Environment to detail; (i) the current number of planning enforcement actions that are being administered within the Lisburn City area; and (ii) the number of staff tasked to deal with these actions.

(AQW 6633/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

- i Cases involving enforcement action within the Lisburn City Council area are dealt with by the Downpatrick Office which currently has 1350 cases, 350 of which are in Lisburn.
- ii. The Downpatrick Office has an enforcement team of 5 professional staff with administrative support. They work across all 4 districts covered by Downpatrick.

Planning: Enforcement Action in Downpatrick

Mr Craig asked the Minister of the Environment (i) what steps his Department is taking to reduce the number of enforcement cases that are being dealt with in the Downpatrick Area Planning Office; and (ii) what action he is taking to ensure that enforcement actions are carried out within a reasonable time period.

(AQW 6634/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

- (i) What steps his Department is taking to reduce the number of enforcement cases that are being dealt with in the Downpatrick Area Planning Office;

Since 2009, there has been an ongoing review of enforcement processes and procedures in Downpatrick as indeed there has been throughout the Department and this has resulted in significant changes and improvements to work practices. The review focused on a 'Strategy' of specific measures aimed at reducing the large number of current enforcement files. The measures involve amongst other things, the increased use of improved IT management systems, the grouping of current cases by age to identify priority cases, the use of weekly management lists by officers to ensure the monitoring of individual case loads and the delivery of associated staff training.

Case officers use the weekly caseload management lists to prioritise, for action, those complaints 3 years and over that may be in danger of becoming immune from enforcement action. In addition, enforcement cases are discussed and reviewed for action at monthly internal enforcement group meetings to ensure that timely action is taken.

The Downpatrick office currently has 1,350 enforcement cases in Ards, Down, Lisburn and North Down. Over the last two years, 2010 – 2011, the Downpatrick office has closed 1440 cases. As an immediate step to assist with the reduction in caseloads, two additional case officers and two casual administrative staff were transferred to the Downpatrick office in January and an additional two officers will be transferred to Downpatrick during February.

- (ii) What action he is taking to ensure that enforcement actions are carried out within a reasonable time period.

I believe that enforcement – particularly for serious environmental and planning issues including crimes – needs to be to be escalated. I am assessing how to do this and have sent out a strong message to my staff that more robust enforcement is an essential element of a balanced planning system.

In December 2011 I introduced new time limits for enforcement with the aim of simplifying the process. I have also instructed my officials to consider what other sections of the Planning Act 2011 can be brought forward to strengthen the enforcement process.

I have requested that regular updates on performance across planning offices are prepared for my consideration, to bear down enforcement in terms of performance and good planning.

Driver and Vehicle Agency: Policy/Legislation Changes

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the impact of the changes to the Driver and Vehicle Agency.

(AQW 6644/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Driver and Vehicle Agency is part of the Department of the Environment and fulfils a vital role in the licensing, testing and enforcement of legislation concerning drivers, vehicles and operators. It also completes work with regard to the excepted matter of vehicle licensing under an agreement between the Secretary of State for Transport and the Department.

A range of changes to relevant policy and legislation are currently being made. These include the implementation of the Goods Vehicles Act 2010, the Taxis Act 2008 and changes to the MOT test in line with changes to European legislation.

The Agency is proceeding with careful planning for the implementation of all of these changes, to ensure continuing high levels of customer service and operational efficiency in this developing environment.

Vehicles: Registration of Imports

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the process under which a vehicle, purchased and converted in the Republic of Ireland, may be registered in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 6655/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Motor cars and light goods vehicles under 10 years old that have been imported into Northern Ireland must provide evidence that they have been either certified in compliance with European Whole Vehicle Type Approval requirements, or have passed a national Individual Vehicle Approval (IVA) test before they can be registered and licensed by DVA.

Imported vehicles that have been originally constructed as motor cars, but subsequently converted to light goods vehicles, are generally required to undergo an IVA test, before registration and licensing can be completed. The test provides assurance that the converted vehicle has been appropriately constructed to European road safety and environmental standards.

The IVA test involves a physical examination of the vehicle and an assessment of a range of formal Type Approval documents. The approval documents relate to a number of specified vehicle systems and components that cannot be appropriately assessed in a vehicle testing environment. The mandatory type approval documents may be obtained by contacting the original vehicle manufacturer, or an authorised Test Laboratory.

The Driver & Vehicle Agency is responsible for conducting IVA tests.

Planning: Fast Food Restaurants

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 6093/11-15, whether he would support a change to planning legislation which would ban the development of fast food restaurants beside schools.

(AQW 6656/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Development proposals for fast food restaurants generally require planning permission irrespective of the proposed location. In addition to planning permission, other approvals may be necessary from the local Council such as building regulation approval and compliance with environmental health regulations.

A proposal to bring about a change in the regulation of fast food restaurants beside schools requires the involvement of a range of stakeholders and Government Departments. I understand that the Minister of Health agrees with my view that further regulation may be desirable and I have received advice on practice in other jurisdictions. I am now looking at what steps might now be taken.

National Park: Mourne

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the plans to create a national park in the Mourne.

(AQW 6715/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In parallel with the recent consultation exercise on enabling legislation for national parks, I brought together a panel of experts to consider which areas of Northern Ireland might be suitable for designation. I am currently considering the panel's report and shall comment on this again in the near future.

Environmental Offences: Convictions

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of convictions for environmental offences in each of the last five years.

(AQW 6716/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The table below sets out the number of prosecutions for environmental offending secured by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency in the last five years. It does not include convictions obtained by other regulatory agencies, e.g. the PSNI for wildlife crime.

The convictions below were taken for waste, water, damage to ASSIs and breaches of The Pollution Prevention and Control Regulations (Northern Ireland).

Year	No. of convictions
2011	90
2010	82
2009	93
2008	108
2007	115

Planning: Replacement Home Approvals

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of (i) planning approvals granted for replacement homes in each of the last five years; and (ii) in how many cases the demolition of the existing house was stipulated as a condition, broken down by the (a) Ballymena; (b) Carrickfergus; and (c) Larne Borough Council areas.

(AQW 6717/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

(I) REPLACEMENT HOMES

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF APPROVALS FOR SINGLE REPLACEMENT DWELLING, 2006/07 TO 2010/11

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	Total
Ballymena	86	108	74	92	46	406
Carrickfergus	11	13	13	14	11	62
Larne	23	37	43	39	19	161
Total	120	158	130	145	76	629

Source: Planning

(II) REPLACEMENT HOMES WITH DEMOLITION CONDITION

TABLE 2: NUMBER OF APPROVALS FOR SINGLE REPLACEMENT DWELLING WITH DEMOLITION CONDITION, 2006/07 TO 2010/11

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	Total
Ballymena	55	64	45	73	33	270
Carrickfergus	2	1	9	8	7	27
Larne	15	31	37	30	12	125
Total	72	96	91	111	52	422

Source: Planning

I have been advised by officials that this information was collated using the computer coding for demolition conditions as a search mechanism. There may have been a small number of approvals with non-standard conditions which would not be reflected in this search.

Given the large number of applications, the amount of work involved in researching each individual case to confirm whether any approvals with non standard conditions should be added to the above data would be disproportionate in terms of staff time and cost.

Dog Fouling: Campaign

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has any plans for a campaign against dog fouling.

(AQW 6742/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Through the introduction of a new system of dog control orders under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, I am enabling district councils to take more robust action against those who do not clean up after their dogs. This will include increased maximum court fines and the ability for councils to increase the amount of a fixed penalty for dog fouling.

The Department intends to issue guidance on the new dog control order regime. In addition to providing assistance to councils on how to make use of the new powers available to them, the guidance will also emphasise to councils the importance of education and awareness in promoting responsible dog ownership.

When the Act comes into operation on 1 April 2012 it will be up to an individual council to decide what campaigns it deems necessary to carry out, based on its own particular circumstances and the action it decides to take in relation to dog fouling.

Dog Fouling: Fines

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of fines issued for dog fouling in each of the last two years, broken down by council area.

(AQW 6743/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Under Article 4 of the Litter (Northern Ireland) Order 1994 it is an offence to permit a dog to foul and the following table details the number of fines issued as a £50 fixed penalty notice for that offence in each in each of the last 2 years, broken down by council area.

2009/2010

District Council	No. of fixed penalties issued
Antrim Borough Council	1
Ards Borough Council	10
Armagh City & District Council	1
Ballymena Borough Council	6
Banbridge District Council	2
Belfast City Council	77
Coleraine Borough Council	40
Cookstown District Council	3
Craigavon Borough Council	78
Down District Council	12

District Council	No. of fixed penalties issued
Larne Borough Council	9
Moyle District Council	4
Newry & Mourne District Council	1
Newtownabbey Borough Council	19
North Down Borough Council	3
Omagh District Council	2
Total	268

2010/2011

District Council	No. of fixed penalties issued
Ards Borough Council	8
Armagh City & District Council	2
Ballymena Borough Council	2
Ballymoney Borough Council	1
Belfast City Council	160
Coleraine Borough Council	33
Cookstown District Council	1
Craigavon Borough Council	50
Derry City Council	1
Down District Council	10
Larne Borough Council	3
Limavady Borough Council	1
Lisburn City Council	2
Magherafelt District Council	1
Moyle District Council	2
Newry & Mourne District Council	5
Newtownabbey Borough Council	33
North Down Borough Council	6
Strabane District Council	2
Total	323

Titanic Signature Project: Planning Permission

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of the Environment to provide details of the planning permission granted to the Titanic Signature Project, including the conditions attached; and whether he is aware of any of the conditions not being met.

(AQW 6746/11-15)

Mr Attwood: On 25 June 2008, the Department granted outline planning permission for phase 2 of the Titanic Quarter development. Phase 2 is a residential led mixed use proposal which incorporates within it the Titanic Signature Project. The outline permission is subject to 29 planning conditions, 8 of which have still to be met in relation to the Signature Project. A copy of the permission is attached at Annex A. I have been advised by my officials that the outstanding conditions will be complied with before the development opens.

Hotels: Planning Applications

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment to list all planning applications for hotels that have been approved, but which are not yet built or completed, broken down by council area.

(AQW 6797/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department has approved 77 applications for hotels in the years 2008/2009 - 2011/2012. Data for 2011/12 is only available up to 30 September 2011. Quarter 3 data will be available in March 2012. The Department does not hold records of development which has not been commenced or is not completed.

The details of the 77 applications are attached at Annex 1.

ANNEX 1

DETAILS OF HOTELS APPROVED BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT DISTRICT (LGD), 2008/09 TO 2011/12

Reference	LGD	Description of Development	Decided
A/2008/0395/LB	DERRY	Refurbishment, part demolition to rear and extension to Listed buildings at 1-4 Shipquay Place and 7-17 Foyle street including yard adjacent to Historic City Walls to new 42 bedroom Boutique Hotel, Bar restaurants, retail unit and basement club with egress points	2009/10
A/2008/0396/F	DERRY	Refurbishment, part demolition and extension to listed buildings at 1-4 Shipquay Place and 7-17 Foyle Street including yard adjacent to City Walls to new 42 Bedroom boutique Hotel, Bar restaurants retail unit and basement club with egress points	2009/10
A/2008/0757/LB	DERRY	Part demolitions and extension to Grade B+ Listed Church building including Manse residence to street to create specialist 15 bedroom Boutique Hotel, Basement Gymnasium and double height Bar Restaurant, including restoration of Neo Classical Portico and Forecourt.	2009/10
A/2008/0762/F	DERRY	Part Demolition and extension to Grade B+ Listed Church Building including Manse residence to street to create specialist 15 bedroom "Boutique" Hotel, Basement Gymnasium and double height Bar Restaurant, including restoration of Neo Classical Portico and Forecourt.	2009/10

Reference	LGD	Description of Development	Decided
A/2008/0766/LB	DERRY	Part demolition and extension to Grade B+ Listed Church building including Manse residence to street to create specialist 15 Bedroom Boutique Hotel, Basement Gymnasium and double height Bar Restaurant, including restoration of Neo Classical Portico and Forecourt.	2009/10
C/2004/1149/F	COLERAINE	Demolition of existing disused dwelling and outhousing to provide 15 Bed hotel, restaurant and bar with new entrance and car parking facilities	2009/10
C/2006/0924/F	COLERAINE	164 bedroom hotel to include 320 seat function room, 9 No. business suites, restaurant, bar, lounge, leisure facility with swimming pool, spa and associated ancillary areas. 24 No. apartments with separate entrance on top floor, on site car park and land	2008/09
C/2007/0330/F	COLERAINE	Erection of 92 bedroom hotel with ancillary areas at Londonderry Hotel, including redevelopment of existing adjacent public house (at junction with No. 2 Atlantic Avenue) in order to also provide new public house/ lounge bar.	2008/09
C/2007/0407/RM	COLERAINE	Site for hotel accommodation with restaurant facilities.	2009/10
C/2008/0946/O	COLERAINE	Proposed 21 bed boutique hotel with associated facilities, car parking and landscape amenity.	2009/10
C/2009/0381/F	COLERAINE	A hotel comprising 46 guest rooms and 3 self catering, bar, restaurant/ bar, spa with swimming pool and treatment rooms and ancillary accommodation.	2010/11
C/2010/0271/F	COLERAINE	Amendment to previously approved scheme to provide 21 no. room hotel with associated car parking and landscaping	2010/11
E/2004/0433/F	MOYLE	Erection of hotel (comprising 15 No. bedrooms, restaurant, bar, function facilities and 23 No. two bedroom apartments); 24 No. holiday chalets with associated access roads, parking and landscaping (amendment to previous approval E/1999/0383/F)	2008/09
E/2007/0335/RM	MOYLE	Erection of 50 bedroom hotel, separate staff accommodation block, 24 holiday cottages and associated landscaping	2008/09
E/2008/0371/O	MOYLE	Proposed conference centre utilising previously approved access road for hotel, planning ref: E/2004/0433/F	2010/11

Reference	LGD	Description of Development	Decided
E/2009/0107/F	MOYLE	Erection of 100 bedroom hotel, separate staff accommodation blocks and holiday chalets, new access, ancilliary car parking and landscaping (permission already granted for 50 bed hotel, staff accommodation block, 24 holiday chalets E/2007/0335/RM)	2009/10
F/2006/0131/O	LARNE	Regeneration of former Magheramorne works and Quarry - Incorporating Mixed use Harbour Village, (consisting of 450 no. Dwellings, Tourist Information Centre, Public House, Restaurants, Retail Units, Community Centre, Hotel, Harbourside Tourist Point with Viewing Tower, Boating Facilities and Chandlery.) Heritage Railway and Visitor Centre, Events Area, Ecology/Art park, Bird Watching and Interpretation Centre, Film Studios and Back Lot, Cycling Centre, (consisting of an Arena, Holiday Cabins, Sports Hotel, Service Complex including Café and Restaurant) Diving Centre, Industrial Archaeology Park, Visitor Accommodation/Facilities and Associated Infrastructure.	2009/10
F/2007/0088/F	LARNE	Change of use of existing craft shop and extension to the east side to form hotel suite. New hotel suite to the east of similar size and character	2009/10
F/2007/0234/O	LARNE	Demolition of existing hotel and construction of 20 No. of 2 Bedroom apartments with amenity storage and associated car parking.	2008/09
H/2009/0138/F	MAGHERAFELT	Internal alterations and change of use to existing bed and breakfast and 2 no apartments to provide 18 bedroom hotel and associated facilities.	2009/10
J/2006/0616/O	STRABANE	Strategic mixed use development comprising an employment Park (Class B1 & B2 uses (Light Industrial) - 15,514 sqm), a leisure complex (4,645 sqm) and hotel (4,645 sqm), together with a comprehensive landscaping strategy incorporating flood protection work	2010/11
J/2009/0070/F	STRABANE	Demolition of existing buildings (30m frontage) and erection of five storeys over basement building. This will include a hotel (22 bedrooms), function room, bar, bistro, basement for ancillary accommodation and associated accommodation and a public house. A vehicular drop-off area is proposed in Abercorn square together with all ancillary site works.	2009/10

Reference	LGD	Description of Development	Decided
K/2006/1161/F	OMAGH	16 Bedroom Hotel with restaurant and 21 No self catering chalets	2008/09
K/2007/0446/O	OMAGH	Major mixed use urban develop ment to include: business and industrial development, hotel, leisure and community uses.	2010/11
L/2006/1513/O	FERMANAGH	Proposed hotel with associated access, car parking, services, including waste water treatment plant and landscaping.	2010/11
N/2007/1052/F	CRAIGAVON	Change of use from existing hotel at 46 Market Street to 10 No. apartments and Change of use of existing HMO at 16-18 Windsor Avenue to provide 6 No. apartments with extensions to the side and rear to provide 7 No. apartments with basement parking (revise	2008/09
N/2009/0355/F	CRAIGAVON	Erection of proposed 52 bed budget hotel with ancillary accommodation and associated car parking and landscaping provision	2010/11
O/2008/0277/F	ARMAGH	Erection of 10 bedroom hotel, restaurant, conference centre with landscaped gardens and associated parking.	2009/10
P/2005/1083/F	NEWRY and MOURNE	Erection of 77 bedroom hotel with conference facilities and restaurant to incorporate ancillary accommodation, access and parking provision and associated site works with partial demolition of Nos. 3 and 4 Trevor Hill, Newry. (amended scheme)	2008/09
P/2005/2523/O	NEWRY and MOURNE	Site for hotel and self catering accommodation.	2008/09
P/2006/1187/O	NEWRY and MOURNE	Extension to shopping centre to include additional mall retail units, hotel, multi-storey car park with retail units at ground floor, new vehicular access to Drumalane Road and associated site works. (Amended Proposal)	2008/09
P/2006/1838/F	NEWRY and MOURNE	Erection of hotel, restaurant and off licence	2008/09
P/2006/2350/LB	NEWRY and MOURNE	Change of use from existing Nursing Home to a 18 bedroom Hotel including internal and external alterations and rear extension.	2008/09
P/2006/2359/F	NEWRY and MOURNE	Change of use from existing nursing home to a 18 Bedroom Hotel and rear extension.	2008/09
P/2009/0630/F	NEWRY and MOURNE	Erection of 61 Bedroom hotel with cafe/ Restaurant and conference facilities with associated car parking	2010/11

Reference	LGD	Description of Development	Decided
R/2005/0414/O	DOWN	Managers Dwelling and 9 Self-catering accommodation (amended scheme) serving hotel & previously approved Golf course R/1995/0383.	2009/10
R/2010/0862/F	DOWN	Full planning application for change of redundant hotel premises to residential care facility and full planning application for 10 short term occupation cottages for people with learning difficulties and respite care in substitution for managers dwelling	2010/11
S/2006/1418/O	LISBURN	Hotel & health spa with associated health facilities, car parking, walk/fitness trails and landscaping of former quarry.	2008/09
S/2007/0385/RM	LISBURN	Site for Hotel	2008/09
S/2007/0771/F	LISBURN	60 bedroom hotel including restaurant and bar facilities, car parking and associated development.	2008/09
S/2008/0052/F	LISBURN	Change of use from licensed restaurant and guest house to hotel with alterations and new bedroom extension.(amended design).	2009/10
S/2008/0304/F	LISBURN	Development of hotel and spa facility with associated car parking and landscaping.	2009/10
T/2004/1305/O	ANTRIM	Site of mixed use development to include residential use, leisure suite, alterations to existing hotel premises to include new craft shop, new dedicated access for hotel with associated reconfiguration of car park. (Amended concept parking and access deta	2008/09
V/2006/0124/F	CARRICKFERGUS	Construction of hotel with leisure facilities, function rooms, garden and associated car park	2008/09
V/2008/0196/O	CARRICKFERGUS	Demolition of the existing building and replace with a new all purpose tourist facility incorporating a hotel, restaurant, bar and golf facilities.	2010/11
X/2008/0783/F	ARDS	Conversion and extension of existing buildings for a proposed 50 bed hotel with supporting services.	2009/10
Y/2008/0495/F	CASTLEREAGH	Proposed 60 bed hotel, family restaurant, car parking and associated site and landscape works (amended drawings)	2010/11
Z/2005/0176/F	BELFAST	Erection of 10-storey hotel comprising 250no. bedrooms, meeting rooms with bar and restaurant on ground floor. Nine-storey open plan office building with ground floor retail unit and underground car parking.	2008/09

Reference	LGD	Description of Development	Decided
Z/2006/2314/LB	BELFAST	Existing building to be restored and retained, extension to south and west with change of use to extended stay hotel and ground floor Class A1 retail unit (Amended description).	2008/09
Z/2006/2325/F	BELFAST	Existing building to be restored and retained, extension to south and west with change of use to extended stay hotel and ground floor Class A1 retail unit (Amended description).	2008/09
Z/2007/1324/F	BELFAST	Mixed use development comprising 169 bedroom hotel, office units, 132 apartments, multi-storey carpark, retail units, cafe and restaurant units, public open space, landscaping and associated site works (Amendments to previous approval Z/2004/2961/F).	2008/09
Z/2007/1867/RM	BELFAST	Erection of hotel (123 no. bedrooms), including bar and restaurant facilities, car parking and associated site works. (Amended Plans).	2008/09
Z/2007/2297/F	BELFAST	Hotel development comprising 124 no. bedrooms plus ancillary uses - bar, dining, kitchen and storage.	2008/09
Z/2007/2674/F	BELFAST	Business centre development, consisting of 12No staff accommodation bedrooms, 10No. office units, 34No guest bedrooms and a link bridge to the existing hotel.	2008/09
Z/2008/0372/F	BELFAST	Demolition of existing building and construction of 11 No. storey commercial office and 145 bedroom hotel development with 2 storey basement parking and associated site works. (amended design)	2008/09
Z/2008/0518/F	BELFAST	Proposed 9-storey, 169-bed hotel incorporating restaurant, bar, dry fitness, small meeting rooms, access and servicing arrangements.	2010/11
Z/2008/0599/O	BELFAST	Proposed major mixed use regeneration project comprising residential development, own door offices, an hotel, restaurants, cafes, call centres/research & development uses, assembly and leisure uses, local retail & professional service uses, a supermarket	2010/11
Z/2008/1513/F	BELFAST	Change of use from bar/restaurant to hotel retaining ground floor bar and first floor restaurant, conversion of second floor restaurant lounge to 6 bedrooms and provision of an additional third floor for 6 bedrooms (12 bedrooms in total). (Amended proposal)	2009/10

Reference	LGD	Description of Development	Decided
Z/2008/1805/F	BELFAST	New hotel development comprising refurbishment of existing listed office building and construction of new bedroom wing to rear of site. (Amended Plans).	2009/10
Z/2008/1963/F	BELFAST	Construction of a 152 bed hotel with conference, leisure and restaurant facilities including associated car parking and general site works	2009/10
Z/2008/2396/F	BELFAST	Construction of basement car park, 250 bed hotel including bar, conference facilities and ancillary accommodation and demolition of 2 storey structure and multi-deck car park	2009/10
Z/2009/0121/F	BELFAST	Demolition of 11 Donegall Square South and 5 Linenhall Street and erection of 9 storey hotel (6 storeys to Donegall Square South and 9 storey to Linenhall Street). Includes refurbishment and connection through to 10 Donegall Square to accommodate 108 bed	2010/11
Z/2009/1061/LB	BELFAST	Refurbishment, part-restoration, change of use and extension of Listed Former Harland and Wolff Headquarters building for use as 111-bedroom boutique hotel, spa facilities, swimming pool, gymnasium and other ancillary uses together with associated access	2010/11
Z/2009/1091/F	BELFAST	Refurbishment, part-restoration change of use and extension of listed former Harland & Wolff Headquarters building for use a 111-bedroom boutique hotel, spa facilities, swimming pool, gymnasium and other ancillary uses together with associated access and	2010/11
Z/2009/1260/F	BELFAST	Erection of hotel comprising 244 bedrooms, ancillary restaurant and conference facilities, hotel offices, landscaped public realm, basement car park and associated site and road works	2010/11
Z/2009/1696/F	BELFAST	Change of use from hotel to two offices class B1(a) at ground floor.	2010/11
Z/2010/0680/F	BELFAST	Change of use from office space/part of hotel to gym.	2010/11
Z/2010/1206/F	BELFAST	Change of use of first floor office of No.11 Donegal Square South to provide extension to kitchen of 10 Square Hotel and conference facilities and link through to 10 Square Hotel.	2010/11
C/2010/0045/F	COLERAINE	Renovation & extension of existing buildings to create new boutique hotel accommodation & associated landscaped access & parking	2011/12

Reference	LGD	Description of Development	Decided
N/2010/0404/F	CRAIGAVON	Erection of Hotel complex	2011/12
W/2008/0456/F	NORTH DOWN	Demolition of existing Royal Hotel and Windsor Bar and erection of replacement 52 room hotel with bar / restaurant, roof top restaurant, 33 apartments, viewing terrace, car parking, amenity space and ancillary accommodation	2011/12
L/2011/0203/F	FERMANAGH	Erection of holiday home having a ridge height of under 5.0 metres with front porch, gable projection and basement for 2No bedrooms, en-suite and bathroom.	2011/12
L/2011/0473/F	FERMANAGH	Proposed 2 No cottages to be used as self contained holiday accommodation (one of which to be specially fully adapted for wheelchair accessible use)	2011/12
L/2011/0594/F	FERMANAGH	Erection of single storey replacement dwelling, providing self-catering tourist accommodation, including conversion of existing stone building to become part of proposed house.	2011/12
P/2007/1352/F	NEWRY and MOURNE	Extension and alterations to existing building to provide hotel facility with 21 bedrooms	2011/12
P/2009/0748/F	NEWRY and MOURNE	Erection of 64 no bedroom hotel with ancillary accommodation incorporating office space and associated site works with internal alteration of No's 3 and 4 Trevor Hill, Newry - Amendment to previous approval P/2005/1083/F	2011/12
X/2008/0920/F	ARDS	Development of three storey 50 bed hotel incorporating restaurant and bar, all associated car parking, landscaping, servicing and infrastructural arrangements, with access off the new Southern Relief Road.	2011/12

Historical Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment (i) to outline the compensatory arrangements that are in place for a landowner, affected by the scheduling of a site under the Historical Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995, in relation to the loss of use and/or any other diminution in their rights; and (ii) for his assessment of whether such arrangements are adequate.

(AQW 6811/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In response to part 1 of your question,

- Articles 9, 10 and 11 of the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995 (The Order) govern the circumstances under which compensation is payable and/or recoverable by the Department in respect of expenditure incurred or other loss or damage sustained in consequence of the refusal, or the granting subject to conditions, of a scheduled monument consent (SMC).

- 2 Article 9 parts (1) and (2) state that if the owner of a scheduled monument sustains any loss or damage in consequence of a refusal of a SMC, or the granting subject to conditions, of a SMC, in relation to any works described below;
 - a) works which are reasonably necessary for carrying out any development for which planning permission has been granted (otherwise than by a general development order) before the time when the monument in question became a scheduled monument and was still effective at the date of the application for scheduled monument consent
 - b) works which do not constitute a development, or constitute development such that planning permission is granted therefore by a general development order; and
 - c) works which are reasonably necessary for the continuation of any use of the monument for any purpose for which it was in immediate use before the date of the application for scheduled monument consent the Department shall pay to that person compensation in respect of that expenditure.
- 3 However, Article 9 (3) provides for the limiting of compensation to any expenditure incurred or other loss or damage sustained by a planning decision made by the Department if it could not be carried out without contravening Article 4(1) which requires scheduled monument consent for a range of damaging works.
- 4 Furthermore, Article 9 (4) removes entitlement to compensation under article 9 (2) a), b) and c) (above) if the works in question or any one of them would or might result in the total or partial demolition or destruction of the monument.
- 5 Article 9(5) excludes the payment of compensation unless compliance with the conditions of scheduled monument consent would make it impossible to use the monument for the purpose there mentioned.
- 6 Article 9 (7) refers to the applicability of Sections 32 and 33 of the Land Development Values (Compensation) Act (Northern Ireland) 1965, subject to any necessary modifications, to valuing any loss or depreciation in value payable under Articles 9 and 11 of the Order.
- 7 Under Article 10 it is possible for the Department to recover any compensation over £200 if the Department grants scheduled monument consent after compensation has already been paid for an earlier refusal of the same works. The same holds for a modification of conditions of a scheduled monument consent. A landowner may appeal this recovery process through the Lands Tribunal.
- 8 Under Article 11 of the Order if authorised works affecting a scheduled historic monument cease to be authorised, any person with an estate in the whole or part of the monument who has incurred expenditure on works considered abortive in removal of that authorisation is entitled to compensation from the Department. However, all such works, loss or damage occurring before the granting of SMC shall not be compensated.

In response to Part 2 of your question the statutory provisions are significant and I have not been convinced to move beyond the current position, but will keep it under review.

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan: Timescale

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to provide a timescale for the finalisation of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan.

(AQW 6865/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Draft BMAP was published in November 2004, and it covers 6 District Council areas including Belfast, Carrickfergus, Castlereagh, Lisburn, Newtownabbey and North Down. Nearly 4,000 objections were received in respect of the Draft Plan and a public inquiry was convened by the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) to consider these objections. This inquiry commenced in April 2007 and finished in May 2008.

Since the conclusion of the public inquiry, the PAC has been considering all the information before it prior to completing its report and making its recommendations available to my Department.

To date, the PAC has delivered several sections of their report, including the part relating to Strategic Retail Issues (received in January 2009), the part relating to the Strategic Plan Framework (received in March 2011), the reports on Belfast, Lisburn and Castlereagh Districts (received in July 2011), and the reports on North Down District, and Lagan Valley Regional Park (received in September 2011). The reports on Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey Districts remain outstanding.

My Department is currently considering the PAC recommendations and preparing the Plan for adoption. The date that BMAP will be adopted will be dependent on when the PAC Report is received in its entirety. I am now assessing how best to manage the report, if parts can be taken forward ahead of full adoption in order to accelerate the issue and help create certainty in these difficult times.

At present it is anticipated that adoption will take place early in 2013.

Councils: Community Planning Functions

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what progress has been made on devolving community planning functions to councils.

(AQW 6866/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Policy proposals in respect of community planning were subject to a public consultation that concluded in March 2011. In response to the proposals outlined within that consultation document;

- There was universal support for the principle that councils should lead and facilitate the community planning process.
- There was also clear support for the principle that an obligation should be placed on all relevant statutory agencies to engage proactively with councils in developing and implementing Community Plans.
- The importance of consultation and engagement with people and communities was also highlighted.
- On the question of central guidance to support community planning, there was broad support for this – but subject to a caveat that such guidance should not be overly prescriptive so as to provide sufficient flexibility at a local level.
- Finally, there was also support across a range of organisations for the creation of clear statutory links between community planning and land-use planning at the local level.

The current position on the reform of local government is reflected in the draft Programme for Government 2011-15, published for public consultation on 17th November 2011, which sets out the Executive's proposal to establish the 11 council model by 2015 and the related key milestones and outputs.

My Department is currently progressing the complex and various work streams around RPA, which include further consideration of Community Planning.

Genmar Companion: Debrief

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions his Department has had with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency in relation to the Genmar Companion incident.

(AQW 6867/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Genmar Companion incident started on 16 December and was managed by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) initially. The incident was taken over by the Secretary of State's Representative for Maritime Salvage and Intervention (SOSREP) on 18 December, as is normal practice in an incident of this nature. From 18 December there were daily discussions between SOSREP, NIEA, MCA and the other relevant parties. I was kept closely informed of the key developments. The MCA ran a full debrief of the incident in MCA Northern Ireland Headquarters, Bregenz House on 26 January, in which NIEA participated. The debrief was chaired by the deputy SOSREP.

Planning: Article 31 Decisions

Mr Givan asked the Minister of the Environment how many Article 31 planning decisions have been (i) approved; and (ii) refused since he has come into office.

(AQW 6944/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Since coming into office, I have put in place measures to actively manage Article 31 applications. I meet with my senior planning team monthly to interrogate applications, to create certainty, move cases to decision and to improve on the management of Article 31 cases. In January, five of the 55 applications as of 1/1/12 were concluded, with three approvals (cemetery at Moira, hotel at Lisburn and Ulster Rugby at Ravenhill). My ambition is to have eight determined in February 2012, meaning 25% of cases will have been concluded January – February 2012.

Arising from the new active management regime, there should be a positive flow of decisions from March to June 2012, with my ambition that up to 65% of cases live on 1/1/12 will be concluded by June 2012 (i.e. 40+ applications). Four applications were concluded prior to 1/1/12.

Tamboran Resources Ltd: Planning Permission

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether Tamboran Resources has sought an application for planning permission, and if so to provide details.

(AQW 6968/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I confirm that no planning application has been received. I have invited the management in to meet. To create certainty, I confirm that any environmental requirements at all stages of this process will be fully and faithfully enforced.

Roads: Oil Spills

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to large oil spills and the clean-up operations undertaken by the Environment Agency, to detail (i) the number of oil spills on roads in the last three years; and (ii) the steps that have been taken to reduce the number of such oil spills.

(AQW 6987/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department for Regional Development Roads Service is the authority responsible for dealing with oil spills on roads. The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) would be involved where spills are large enough to pose a significant water pollution risk or other environmental threat.

Roads Service usually leads on the clean up of roads following any oil spill and NIEA would only be called upon to assist where there is a significant risk of water pollution associated with the clean up operation. The Agency has no power to take steps to prevent the majority of such oil spills to roads. You may wish to take this matter forward with Roads Service to address.

The table below sets out the number of oil spills impacting on roads, for which NIEA holds records, in each of the past three years. This includes the severity of the incident in terms of water pollution caused as a result.

Year	High Severity Water Pollution Impact	Medium Severity Water Pollution Impact	Low Severity Water Pollution Impact	Total
2009	0	2	5	7
2010	0	0	9	9
2009	0	2	5	7

Review of Public Administration: Council Staff

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the impact of the proposed Review of Public Administration on staff numbers in each council.

(AQW 7015/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Clearly the Executive's decision to reduce the number of councils to eleven will, when implemented, impact on the number of staff employed by the twenty six councils that currently exist. Further work is required for this to be quantified but clearly there will be an impact on staff numbers, arguably more than with the fifteen model.

It is my intention to re-establish the eleven Transition Committees shortly and the assessment of the Human Resource implications of local government reform, including the impact on staff numbers, are key issues that they will be addressing. These issues will be carefully considered and negotiated with staff representative organisations and employing authorities through the Local Government Reform Joint Forum which was set up for this purpose.

These considerations will be underpinned by the commitment to act in the best interests of the affected staff enshrined in the Public Service Commission guiding principles for RPA which have been agreed with the Executive. Moreover, I believe we should assess how to protect the interests of councillors, who served in dark days, at some risk and with little financial recognition.

Trade Union Duties

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of full-time equivalent staff, in his Department or its arm's-length bodies, who carried out trade union duties, during trade union facility time, in (i) 2000/01; (ii) 2005/06; and (iii) 2010/11, broken down by trade union.

(AQW 7017/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The number of full-time equivalent staff in the Department of the Environment (DOE) who carried out trade union duties during trade union facility time in 2000/01, 2005/06 and 2010/11, broken down by trade union, is set out in the Table below.

The recording of this information prior to the introduction of HRConnect in 2008 was paper based and managed and maintained at line manager level. The information available for 2000/01 and 2005/06, as set out in the Table below, reflects that migrated to the HR Connect system in 2008, however given the nature of the recording process prior to 2008 the Department is unable to validate the information. This may indicate the apparent variation in the figures provided.

Department	Year	Number of Staff	Union
DOE	2000/2001	1	NIPSA
	2005/2006	22	NIPSA
	2010/2011	16	NIPSA

I wish to make it clear that I support the grant of facilities to the trade unions. They have been the central element in the promotion and protection of worker's rights and a key element in social contract politics going forward.

Flooding: Antrim and Randalstown Areas

Ms Lewis asked the Minister of the Environment how much was paid in compensation to victims affected by flooding in the Antrim and Randalstown areas in October 2011.

(AQO 1157/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Antrim Borough Council made 11 payments of £1,000 each to householders in the Antrim/Randalstown area, specifically Castle Road, Edenduff Terrace and Milltown Road.

These payments were not compensation but were practical assistance for householders who suffered severe inconvenience due to flooding in October 2011 to ensure their homes were made habitable as quickly as possible.

Councils: Written-off Debt

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, for each of the last three years, to detail (i) the number of local councils which have written-off monies owed for payment of services; and (ii) the level of debt written-off by each council.

(AQW 7180/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Based on information provided to the Department by Councils:

- (i) In 2008/2009, 18 councils wrote off monies owed for payment of services.
In 2009/2010, 18 councils wrote off monies owed for payment of services.
In 2010/2011, 19 councils wrote off monies owed for payment of services.
- (ii) The level of debt from monies written off due to failure to pay for services provided is detailed within the enclosed table below.

Council	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011
Antrim	0	0	46,298
Ards	2,005	3,149	980
Armagh	0	7,883	4,452
Ballymena	11,714	12,345	2,200
Ballymoney	0	0	0
Banbridge	0	0	0
Belfast	1,877	26,466	132,972
Carrickfergus	128	18,961	3,126
Castlereagh	10,802	1,375	4,350
Coleraine	0	0	0
Cookstown	552	3,079	481
Craigavon	0	0	0
Derry	12,918	9,844	12,755
Down	26,523	28,991	12,682
Dungannon	4,806	704	6,550
Fermanagh	652	29,455	947
Larne	0	2,303	576
Limavady	14,705	0	0
Lisburn	469	2,122	353
Magherafelt	0	0	0
Moyle	675	374	10,166
Newry & Mourne	2,201	13,654	3,228
Newtownabbey	7,976	0	0

Council	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011
North Down	4,426	8,115	1,743
Omagh	2,985	2,984	4,610
Strabane	1,368	3,042	1,255
Total	106,782	174,846	249,724

MLAs: Remuneration

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the timescale for a decision to be taken on the remuneration of MLAs who are also councillors; and whether this will be factored into the councils' rates estimates for 2012/13. [R]

(AQW 7189/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department issued a consultation, which closed on 16 December 2011, seeking views on a possible two thirds reduction being applied to the basic allowance and special responsibility allowance payable to councillors who are also MLAs and/or MPs and/or Members of the House of Lords. None of the respondents opposed the proposal for reducing the allowances.

I intend to bring forward the necessary legislation to reduce the allowances of multiple mandate councillors before the summer.

Councils: Capital Spend

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what steps he intends to take to control capital spending by councils, prior to the implementation of the Review of Public Administration.

(AQW 7193/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Councils need to act responsibly and prudently in relation to capital expenditure, and I will be encouraging them strongly to liaise on this matter with the councils with which they will be forming new councils in 2015. I will be recommending that this liaison should be managed through the relevant Voluntary Transition Committee, which should promote a pragmatic and responsible approach to the future needs of the new enlarged council. In addition, I will issue guidance to ensure responsible borrowing and decision making.

I will also consider whether legislation will be required to introduce a statutory control on such council expenditure in the period leading to implementation of Reform. This control could be effected through Statutory Transition Committees when they are established.

However, as Belfast City Council has demonstrated, Councils can play a decisive role in releasing funds for civic projects and local jobs. There may be some, albeit limited, opportunity for this to be duplicated.

Planning Application B/2100/0057/F

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment (i) why the amended plan for planning application B/2100/0057/F is being advertised on 31 January and 1 February 2012, with a closing date of 1 February 2012 for public objection; and (ii) whether this creates a democratic deficit for all concerned to object.

(AQW 7326/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department issued neighbour notification letters on 19 January 2012 which requested that written comments should be submitted by 2 February 2012. In addition to this, the amended plans and traffic figures will be advertised in the Northern Constitution, Londonderry Sentinel and Derry Journal newspapers during the week ending 3 February 2012 and the advert will request written comments to be submitted within the next 14 days thereafter.

Through the issuing of neighbour notification letters and advertisement in the local press, the Department has informed the local community of the application and provided them with the opportunity to consider the proposal and to comment on it accordingly. It should be noted that whilst the neighbour notification letters and advertisement specify a date for written comments to be submitted, the Department will accept, and consider, written comments at all stages during the processing of a planning application up to the date when a decision issues. Consequently, the democratic and community interests, which I will robustly defend, are protected with reasonable opportunities for citizen input into this important matter.

Driver and Vehicle Agency: Release of Information

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of the Environment whether the Driver and Vehicle Agency is authorised to release vehicle owner details to owners or operators of private car parks.

(AQW 7430/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Vehicle licensing is an excepted matter which is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Transport. It is administered in Northern Ireland by the Driver & Vehicle Agency under a formal agreement between the Department of the Environment and the Department for Transport.

In relation to the release of information, DVA acts in accordance with the policy as set by DVLA. The relevant legislation permitting the release of information from the vehicles register is regulation 27 (1) (e) of the Road Vehicles (Registration and Licensing) Regulations 2002 which states “(1) The Secretary of State may make any particulars contained in the register available for use - ... (e) by any person who can show to the satisfaction of the Secretary of State that he has reasonable cause for wanting the particulars to be made available to him”.

Under DVLA's policy on the operation of Regulation 27(e), DVA is authorised to release vehicle owner details to owners or operators of private car parks. The supply of information to private car parking companies is carefully controlled, within the parameters of the “reasonable cause” provision. Information is only released to reputable companies which are regulated by accredited trade bodies.

Mobile Phone Applications

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) any mobile phone applications that have been designed by his Department, and its arm's length bodies, for use by members of the public; and (ii) any that are currently being developed.

(AQW 7456/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

- i An iPhone app was part of the interpretive solution at Dunluce Castle which in turn was part of the 50% funded (by DOE NIEA) Signature Project run by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board on the Causeway Coastal Route. The app is free to download from the iTunes store and features a short film, interactive map and audio-visual tours of the site.
- ii. An educational tool based at the Crawfordsburn Country Park is at the very early stages of development and has the potential to become an audio tour or mobile phone app.

Given the scale of our natural and built heritage and its importance in economic and tourist growth, the identification of how an “app” strategy could be developed would be of use and I have asked officials to bring forward information on this approach.

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan: Publication

Mr Givan asked the Minister of the Environment when his Department will publish the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan.

(AQW 7534/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Following the completion of the BMAP Public Inquiry in May 2008, the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) indicated a preliminary timescale for the delivery of their report to Planning Service as early summer 2010.

There has been a significant delay in the receipt of these reports, with the final reports only being delivered to my Department on 31 January 2012.

The PAC recommendations are currently being considered, and the Plan is being prepared for adoption. At present it is anticipated that BMAP will be published in the early part of 2013. I fully acknowledge that the delay on BMAP is frustrating. Consequently, I am considering what I can do in relation to its contents in advance of full publication.

Current/Capital Budget Allocation

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of the Environment whether his departmental revenue expenditure varies proportionately to his capital budget allocation.

(AQW 7548/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department's main aims are to protect and improve the environment; support a sustainable economy; promote well being; and to promote a strong and effective local government. These responsibilities are discharged mainly by Departmental staff with the associated administrative costs forming a significant proportion of the Department's current expenditure (revenue) budget.

The Department's capital investment plans comprise mainly of a number of small capital projects and capital grant schemes.

The table below details the Departments current expenditure and capital investment budgets covering the period 2012-15, as approved by the Executive. The table also provides the capital investment budget expressed as a percentage of the current expenditure budget.

	£ million		
	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Current Expenditure Budget	123.9	120.7	120.2
Capital Investment Budget	5.9	4.0	7.6
Capital Investment Budget as a % of Current Expenditure Budget	4.8%	3.3%	6.3%

The Budget (2012-15) figures show that although the current expenditure budget decreases by £3.7 million (2.9%) between 2012-13 and 2014-15, the capital budget increases by £1.7 million (28.8%). There is no correlation between movements in the Department's current and capital expenditure.

Hydraulic Fracturing: NIEA Briefing

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment which of his Executive colleagues have met the Environment Agency to discuss hydraulic fracturing; and (ii) to provide details of any reports and briefings that the Environment Agency has produced on hydraulic fracturing.

(AQW 7606/11-15)

Mr Attwood: A DETI led officials group has met to consider the issue of fracking. In this forum, all issues related to fracking are or will be assessed. I confirm that all appropriate environmental assessments will be upheld and fulfilled.

My Department is in the process of drafting a Position Statement on the issue of hydraulic fracturing which will be published on my Department's website when complete. In addition, NIEA have met with the EPA in the Republic of Ireland and there is ongoing assessment of how across the island and within NI departments, these issues can be properly managed.

Planning Policy Statement 18

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment why reference to community benefits was removed from the draft PPS 18; and whether he has any plans to address this matter.

(AQW 7617/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The previous Minister of the Environment published PPS 18 in its current form. While I am aware that the draft PPS 18 contained information on community benefits, the provision of such benefits is voluntary and takes place outside of the planning system.

I support the principle and practice of community benefits. I have asked officials some weeks back to provide advice on community benefit practice elsewhere in order to identify how to build up best practice and receive improved community benefit arising from planning approval.

High Hedges Act (NI) 2011

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how many prosecutions have been brought, to date, under the High Hedges Act (NI) 2011.

(AQW 7622/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Although the High Hedges Act (NI) 2011 received Royal Assent in May 2011 it is not possible for it to become operational until the detail provided for in subordinate legislation is also in place. All of the necessary legislation is scheduled to come into effect on 31 March 2012. Thus to date no prosecutions have been possible.

Listed Buildings: Ballymoney/Ballycastle/Ballymena

Mr Storey asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of listed buildings in the (a) Ballymoney; (b) Ballycastle; and (c) Ballymena areas.

(AQW 7625/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency records listed buildings on a ward basis within District Council areas (1974 boundaries apply).

There are currently 86 listed buildings in the Ballymoney District Council area; 332 in the Ballycastle (Moyle District Council) area (there are 64 listed buildings in Ballycastle town itself); and 258 in the Ballymena Borough Council Area.

It should be noted that some of these entries may relate to multiple properties - such as terraces or large estates - which may feature on the list as a single record.

More detailed information on individual buildings/addresses may be found on the Northern Ireland Buildings Record which is published on NIEA's website.

You can access this information via the following link:

<http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/other-index/content-databases/content-databases-build.htm>

Water Pollution: Down Area

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of (i) incidents of; and (ii) prosecutions for water pollution in the Down District Council area in (a) 2009; (b) 2010; and (c) 2011, broken down by the source of the pollution.

(AQW 7669/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Table 1 below provides details of the confirmed water pollution incidents in the Down District Council area in each of the past three years, broken down against the main incident source classes.

TABLE 1: SOURCE OF CONFIRMED WATER POLLUTION INCIDENTS IN DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA FOR EACH OF THE PAST THREE YEARS

Year	Domestic	Farm	Industry	Transport	NIW	Other	Total
2009	0	4	6	1	26	9	46
2010	4	4	4	1	20	18	51
2011	6	8	2	1	14	19	50

NIEA's enforcement policy, as it relates to water pollution incidents, is that for all High and Medium Severity water pollution incidents, where the polluter can be identified, the Agency will normally pursue appropriate enforcement action against that polluter.

Enforcement action may include one or more of the following:-

- Prosecution;
- Issuing of a Legally Binding Notice;
- Issuing of a Warning Letter and/or, for agricultural incidents, 'Breaching' under Cross Compliance (where the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development may initiate a deduction from a farmer's Single Farm Payment).

The majority of the incidents in Table 1 above were of Low severity: i.e. they resulted in a minimal, short-lived or very localised environmental effect. Out of the confirmed pollution incidents in each year, 29 were of Low severity in 2009; 39 were of Low severity in 2012; and 36 were of Low severity in 2011.

There is a proportion of High and Medium severity water pollution incidents where, for a variety of reasons, prosecution (and in some cases other lesser enforcement action) is not appropriate. This includes; where despite a full investigation the polluter cannot be identified, or where there are significant mitigating factors.

Table 2 below, details the prosecutions, to date for confirmed water pollution incidents, which occurred in each of the past three years, in Down District Council area. This includes both prosecutions which have resulted in a conviction and those which are still at various stages in the legal process (it typically takes 12-18 months, and sometimes significantly more, for a prosecution to pass through the legal process and be heard in court).

TABLE 2: PROSECUTIONS TO DATE FOR CONFIRMED WATER POLLUTION INCIDENTS OCCURRING IN DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA IN EACH OF THE PAST THREE YEARS

Year in which the incident occurred	Prosecutions	Source
2009	6	4 x NIW; 1 x Agriculture; 1 x Industry.
2010	3	All NIW.
2011	5	3 x NIW, 1 x Domestic, 1 x Agriculture.

Wildlife: Endangered Species

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department has undertaken, or plans to undertake, studies on endangered wildlife species.

(AQW 7686/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Natural Heritage Directorate of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) has a long track record of undertaking studies or evidence gathering on endangered wildlife species.

NIEA routinely gathers data on a broad range of wildlife species. Such evidence can form part of one-off studies or be part of longer term monitoring activities, for example wildfowl or seal surveillance. In some cases information is gained from other science experts outside the Agency or from specially commissioned research.

NIEA and its predecessors have been involved in such studies since the mid 1980s and the focus has been on wildlife species that are considered a conservation priority. Such species include those protected under domestic legislation, for example the Wildlife Order, or for which we have an international responsibility; notably species listed in the annexes of the EC Habitats Directive. New studies are proposed on an ongoing basis and commissioned subject to priority and budget availability.

Carrier Bags: Single Use Levy

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment if, and when, any further legislation will be introduced in relation to the single use carrier bag levy.

(AQW 7696/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The enabling legislation to introduce a levy on single use carrier bags is provided by the Climate Change Act 2008 and the Single User Carrier Bags Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

This enabling legislation provides that detailed arrangements for a charging scheme for single use carrier bags are to be provided for in subordinate legislation. Officials are currently working on the required regulations and it is hoped that consultation should begin at the end of March 2012 with the subordinate legislation in place early in 2013. This would allow charging for single use bags to commence in April 2013.

I plan to extend the levy to lower cost reusable bags from April 2014; this will require further primary legislation.

The Executive has given approval in principle for the required Bill. Work on that Bill is at its early stages but will be progressed as soon as possible. Thereafter additional subordinate legislation will also be required.

Carrier Bags: Single Use Levy

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the regulations that will be introduced prior to the introduction of the single use carrier bag levy; and (ii) the timescale for introducing the regulations.

(AQW 7697/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The detailed provision for the introduction of the single use carrier bag levy will be contained in regulations made under the Climate Change Act 2008 and the Single User Carrier Bags Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

The regulations will specify the sellers and bags to be covered by the new arrangements, set the minimum charge and make provision for administration, collection and enforcement. I am committed to ensuring that the regulations are brought forward as soon as possible and I will therefore seek to commence public consultation at the end of March 2012.

I anticipate that the regulations will be in place early in 2013 to allow charging for single use bags to commence in April 2013.

Carrier Bags: Single Use Levy

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment what exemptions there will be for the single use carrier bag levy.

(AQW 7698/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I have not yet taken a final decision on exemptions from the levy.

However the Department's 2011 policy consultation – and related engagement with key stakeholders – confirmed strong support for consistency with the Welsh approach to exemptions. This would mean specific exemptions on grounds such as patient confidentiality (items supplied on prescription), hygiene and food safety – and where a bag is necessary to protect both goods and consumers.

Thus, for example bags for unwrapped and partially wrapped food would be exempt from the charge. Exemptions would also apply in the case of very small bags, mail order/carrier packaging, previously used bags and reusable bags.

I see merit in legislating for similar exemptions here. This would ensure consistency of approach and clarity for retailers, particularly those operating in both countries. It would also help ensure that bags are only issued free in circumstances where the nature of the product requires that a bag should be supplied.

However, I want to ensure that the exemptions from the levy are entirely appropriate for local circumstances. Before making a final decision on exemptions, I will therefore consider the outcome of the Department's consultation on the draft carrier bag regulations. This is due to take place later this year.

Carrier Bags: Single Use Levy

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment how much revenue the single use carrier bag levy is projected to generate in each of the next four years.

(AQW 7699/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Evidence from other countries demonstrates that a bag levy is a simple and effective means to reduce substantially the negative environmental impact of carrier bag consumption. A 10p levy on single use carrier bags and lower cost reusable carrier bags can therefore bring about significant environmental improvement.

In the first year I propose to discount the charge to 5p and limit the levy to single use carrier bags. This will provide consumers with time to adapt their shopping habits to the new levy.

The amount of revenue that will ultimately be raised will be dependent on consumer behaviour. In the event that the local experience is similar to that of other jurisdictions that have introduced bag charges, the single use carrier bag levy is anticipated to generate around £1.5m in net revenue in the first year.

In subsequent years, once the levy increases to 10p and is extended to lower cost reusable carrier bags, financial modelling suggests that the target net revenue of £4m per annum could be achieved. On this basis, the levy would raise £13.5m net of costs over the first 4 years of operation.

Carrier Bags: Single Use Levy

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment to detail what potential savings businesses could make from the introduction of the single use carrier bag levy and a reduced demand for carrier bags.

(AQW 7700/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The potential savings to businesses will ultimately be dependent on consumer behaviour. In the event that the local experience is similar to that of other jurisdictions that have introduced bag charges, the carrier bag levy is anticipated to reduce single use carrier bag consumption by more than 80%. Such a reduction would equate to around 200 million fewer single use carrier bags being consumed here every year.

While precise data is not available, the purchase and free distribution of such bags by retailers is currently estimated to cost over £3m per annum. It is anticipated that the potential savings to retailers from an 80% reduction in single use carrier bag consumption will more than outweigh any administrative costs for retailers.

Carrier Bags: Single Use Levy

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment how the single use carrier bag levy will be administered to reduce costs to businesses.

(AQW 7777/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My intention is to deliver simple and cost effective carrier bag levy administration arrangements which ensure minimum bureaucracy and cost to both business and the Department.

Retailers existing administrative arrangements should be broadly consistent with any requirements of the carrier bag levy and an in-house online reporting and payment system is currently being developed so as to minimise any administrative burden.

In seeking to ensure that levy administration costs to business are kept to a minimum I have considered evidence from introduction of the levy in the Republic of Ireland which highlights how additional administration costs to retailers were seen as modest and generally less than the savings that retailers were enjoying from purchasing fewer bags.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Civil Servants: Retired but Working as Consultants

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many retired civil servants at grades 1, 2 or 3 (i) have been re-employed in any capacity by the Civil Service; or (ii) are now paid out of the public purse in other capacities, such as in consultancy work.

(AQW 6147/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): During the period 1 January 2009 and 1 January 2012 there were 3 staff, all at Grade 3 level, who retired and were either re-employed by the Northern Ireland Civil Service or were paid for carrying out work on behalf of the Civil Service. The Department of Finance and Personnel does not hold information on other public sector organisations.

Civil Service: Vacancies

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the (i) location; and (ii) number of vacant posts in the Civil Service at (a) Administrative Assistant; (b) Administrative Officer; (c) Executive Officer II; (d) Executive Officer I; and (e) Staff Officer; and (f) Deputy Principal grades, broken down by Department.

(AQW 6295/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The information requested is set out in the attached table.

AQW 6295/11 - LOCATION & NUMBER (FTE)(1) OF VACANT POSTS IN THE NICS AT AA A0, E02, E01, S0 & DP - 13/1/12

	AA	Location	A0	Location	E01I	Location	E01	Location	S0	Location	DP	Location
DARD(2)	1	Stormont	1.8	Stormont	6.5	4 Londonderry	3	2 Stormont	6	3 Stormont	4	Stormont
						2 Stormont		1 Coleraine		1 Belfast		
						0.5 Coleraine				1 Ballymena		
DCAL	0		0		0		0		3	1 Brussels	0	
DE	0		0		2	Bangor	1	Bangor	2	Belfast	6	Bangor
DEL	2	Belfast	15	10 Belfast	21.67	8.67 Belfast	15.5	14.5 Belfast	9	Belfast	1	Belfast
						2 Newry						
						2Newtownabbey						
				2 Kilkeel		2 Enniskillen						
						1 Banbridge						
						1 Strabane						
						1 Dungannon		1 Larne				
						1 Lisburn						
						1 Armagh						
						1 Portadown						
						1 Lurgan						
DETI	0		4	Belfast	0		1	Belfast	2	Belfast	0	Belfast
DFP(3)	2	Belfast	10	Belfast	5	4 Belfast	2	Belfast	1	Belfast	7	Belfast
						1 Bangor						

	AA	Location	AO	Location	EOII	Location	EO1	Location	SO	Location	DP	Location	
DHSSPS	0		0		0		0		0		0		
DOE	2	1 Belfast	11	7 Belfast	12	6 Belfast	7	3 Belfast	12	7 Belfast	2	1 Belfast	
		1 Coleraine		2 Coleraine		1.5 Enniskillen		4 Derry		4 Coleraine		5 Coleraine	1 Coleraine
				0.5 Downpatrick				2 Coleraine					
DOJ(4)	3	2 Maghaberry	9.51	5.51 Belfast	-		-		12	10 Stormont	4	Stormont	
		1 Stormont		2 Londonderry		1 Maghaberry				2 Maghaberry			
				1 Newtownards									
DRD	0		5	Belfast	2	1 Belfast	2	1 Belfast	1	1	Belfast		
DSD	5	2 Londonderry	76	57 Belfast	116	92 Belfast	11	8 Belfast	10	9 Belfast	3	Belfast	
		1 Belfast		11 Londonderry		20 Londonderry		1 Portadown					
		1 Armagh		3 Newry		1 Bangor		1 Lurgan		1 Londonderry			
				1 Bangor		1 Cookstown		1 Ballynahinch					
		1 Banbridge		1 Kilkeel		1 Knockbreda		1 Downpatrick					
OFMDFM	0		0		1	Stormont	0	3	Stormont	2	Stormont		
PPS(5)	0		0		4	Belfast	0	1	Ballymena	0			
Total	15		132.31		170.17		42.5		62		30		

Notes

- (1) FTE = Full-time Equivalent.
- (2) DARD SO Brussels is a secondment opportunity.
- (3) DFP Figures have been provided at 30 December 2011.
- (4) DOJ Grading Review to determine whether EO posts are EO2 or EO1 level. No information available on vacancies until this is complete.
- (5) PPS Grading Review to determine whether EO posts are EO2 or EO1 level; shown in Table as EO2.

Trade Union Duties

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of full-time equivalent staff, in his Department or its arm's-length bodies, who carried out trade union duties, during trade union facility time, in (i) 2000/01; (ii) 2005/06; and (iii) 2010/11, broken down by trade union.

(AQW 7018/11-15)

Mr Wilson: In 2000/01 there were 1.7 (FTE) staff carrying out trade union duties for NIPSA.

In 2005/06 there was 1 (FTE) staff carrying out trade union duties for NIPSA, with an additional 1 (FTE) staff providing administrative support.

In 2010/11 there were 3 (FTE) staff carrying out trade union duties for NIPSA, with 1 (FTE) staff providing administrative support. There was also 0.05 (FTE) staff carrying out trade union duties for the FDA.

There were no staff in the Department's arms length bodies who carried out trade union duties.

Civil Service: Administrative Officer Posts

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the (i) number of applications; and (ii) number of appointments for administrative assistant and administrative officer posts within the Civil Service for people from a (a) Protestant; (b) Roman Catholic; and (c) other religious background in each of the last five years.

(AQW 7562/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Information on applications and appointments to permanent posts for Administrative Officer and Administrative Assistant is set out in the tables below.

NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS BY FINANCIAL YEAR, BY GRADE AND COMMUNITY BACKGROUND

Year	AA			AO			Total
	P	RC	Other	P	RC	Other	
2007/2008	0	0	0	3033	2765	120	5918
2008/2009	2240	2050	31	4667	4546	163	13697
2009/2010	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2010/2011	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2011/2012 Year to date *	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	2240	2050	31	7700	7311	283	19615

NUMBER OF APPOINTMENTS BY FINANCIAL YEAR, BY GRADE AND COMMUNITY BACKGROUND

Year	AA			AO			Total
	P	RC	Other	P	RC	Other	
2007/2008	114	78	3	159	156	7	517
2008/2009	168	120	4	518	486	15	1311
2009/2010	56	45	2	75	78	1	257
2010/2011	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
2011/2012 Year to Date *	5	7	0	30	21	0	63
Total	344	250	9	782	741	23	2149

* Figures as at 7th February 2012

Rates Bills

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) what is the average (a) domestic; and (b) non-domestic rates bill; and (ii) how these figures compare to those in (a) England; (b) Scotland; and (c) Wales.

(AQW 7582/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The average domestic rates bill for Northern Ireland in 2011/12 is £778. This compares to average council tax bill in the rest of the UK for 2011/12 as follows:

	Average council tax per chargeable dwelling 2011/12
England	£1,196
Scotland	£984
Wales	£1,012

In addition, households in the rest of the UK pay separate water and sewerage charges. These were around £356 on average in England and Wales and £324 in Scotland in 2011/12. This means that average household charges in the rest of the UK range from £1,308 to £1,552. This means that local household taxes and charges in Northern Ireland are the lowest in the UK by some distance.

The average non-domestic rate bill in Northern Ireland for 2011/12 is £10,052. This compares to average non-domestic rate bills calculated for England and Scotland (Wales not available) as follows:

	Average non-domestic rates bills
England (estimate)	£14,190
Scotland (estimate)	£13,422

Official figures are not available from the other UK administrations. These figures are based on average rateable values in 2010, using poundages for 2011/12, and are comparative estimates calculated by my Department. The estimated figures are also before the application of any reliefs or exemptions.

It should be noted that such comparisons in the non-domestic sector are relatively meaningless as we do not have the same scale of big business here. For example high value undertakings such as the City of London, petro chemical plants and Heathrow, significantly affect the average in England.

Small Business Rate Relief Scheme

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the number of non-domestic properties that benefited from the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme at January 2012; and (ii) to provide an estimate of the number of non-domestic properties that might benefit under the proposed enhanced Small Business Rate Relief Scheme, broken down by the (a) Carnlough; (b) Glenariffe; (c) Cushendall; and (d) Cushendun areas.

(AQW 7793/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Information on the number of non-domestic properties that might benefit from the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme is collated at District Council and Ward level only. Information is therefore provided on the Glenaan and Glendun Wards instead of Cushendall and Cushendun.

The table below indicates the number of properties in the Carnlough, Glenaan, Glenariff and Glendun ward areas that are currently benefiting from the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme (as at 29th January 2012) and an estimate of the additional number which are likely to benefit under the enhanced Small Business Rate Relief Scheme (which will be introduced on 1st April 2012, subject to Assembly approval).

NUMBER OF PROPERTIES CURRENTLY RECEIVING SMALL BUSINESS RATE RELIEF AND THE ESTIMATED NUMBER OF ADDITIONAL PROPERTIES LIKELY TO BE ENTITLED UNDER THE EXPANDED SMALL BUSINESS RATE RELIEF SCHEME

Ward	Properties Currently Entitled under Existing SBRR Scheme	Estimated Additional Properties under Expanded SBRR Scheme
Carnlough	52	*
Glenaan	52	7
Glenariff	26	7
Glendun	28	*

* 5 properties or less

Human Resources

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many staff are employed in his Department's Human Resources section.

(AQW 7880/11-15)

Mr Wilson: There are currently 34 staff employed in the Department's Human Resources section.

External Consultants: Guidelines

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps he intends to take to ensure that Government Departments, and their arm's-length bodies, comply with the guidelines, rules and regulations on the employment of external consultants.

(AQW 7904/11-15)

Mr Wilson: My Department's current guidance provides a clear framework, covering all aspects of the employment of external consultants. It is the responsibility of Departmental Accounting Officers to ensure all relevant bodies comply with this guidance.

Compliance will be subject to scrutiny through the annual audit process and DFP's annual compliance report.

Unemployment: Belfast/Armagh/Derry

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the percentage of adults who are currently unemployed in the (i) Belfast; (ii) Armagh; and (iii) Derry city areas.

(AQW 7915/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The official measure of unemployment is sourced to the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (LFS). However, the LFS is a sample survey and the percentage of adults who are currently unemployed in the aforementioned District Council Areas are not available from this source due to sample size constraints.

The following table is sourced to the claimant count measure of unemployment. This shows the number of persons claiming unemployment related benefits at January 2012 and this figure as a percentage of the resident working age population.

District Council Area	Claimants	
	Number	Rate
Armagh	1,973	5.3
Belfast	12,931	7.3
Derry	5,998	8.4

Unemployment: Belfast/Armagh/Derry

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the percentage of adults who are currently in long-term unemployment in the (i) Belfast; (ii) Armagh; and (iii) Derry city areas.

(AQW 7917/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The official measure of unemployment is sourced to the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (LFS). However, the LFS is a sample survey and the percentage of adults who are currently in long-term unemployment in the aforementioned District Council Areas are not available from it due to sample size constraints.

The following table is sourced to the claimant count measure of unemployment. This shows the number of persons claiming unemployment related benefits for over a year at January 2012 and this figure as a percentage of the resident working age population.

District Council Area	Claiming over 1 year	
	Number	Rate
Armagh	620	1.7
Belfast	3,190	1.8
Derry	1,725	2.4

Elderly Population: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is the projected increase in the elderly population in the North Down area in each of the next three years.

(AQW 7948/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The table below shows the mid-year population statistics for persons aged 65 or over resident in North Down Local Government District. The table below shows the estimate for 2010 and projections for 2011-15 with the percentage increase since 2010.

Year	Population aged 65 or over ¹	Projected increase since 2010
2010 (Estimated)	14,500	
2011 (Projected)	14,900	+2.3%
2012 (Projected)	15,300	+5.4%
2013 (Projected)	15,700	+8.2%
2014 (Projected)	16,200	+11.1%
2015 (Projected)	16,500	+13.5%

- 1 The mid-year population estimates and projections are generally quoted in rounded form as population counts from the Census and subsequent updates involving births, deaths and migration cannot be precise. Local area population projections are based on the 2008 population estimates baseline.

Welfare Reform

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in relation to on-going Welfare Reform.

(AQW 7995/11-15)

Mr Wilson: To date I have not had any discussions with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in relation to ongoing Welfare Reform.

Although DFP maintain a keen interest in Welfare Reform the Department for Social Development has lead responsibility for that policy.

Empty Properties: Foyle

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to provide a breakdown of the 1,500 empty properties identified within the Foyle constituency, broken down by (i) whether it is a (a) house; (b) flat; or (c) former small business premises; and (ii) whether it has (a) one; (b) two; or (c) three/four bedrooms.

(AQW 8007/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Of the 1,500 vacant residential properties within the Derry City Council Area as at 22nd January, (a) 1,087 were houses, (b) 339 were flats and 74 were other types of property. Of the 1,500 properties, 28 were formerly non-domestic properties. It is not possible to identify whether any of these properties were former small business premises.

Of the 1,415 properties where the number of bedrooms was recorded, 153 had one bedroom, 338 had two bedrooms and 924 had three or more bedrooms.

Account NI: PwC Contract

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the guidance his Department received from the Central Procurement Directorate on the extension to the Account NI procurement contract; (ii) for his assessment of whether his Department breached any EU legislation; (iii) why the Account NI procurement contract required additional finance; (iv) why his Department disagrees with the conclusion of the Audit Office which stated that the project had overrun in terms of cost and time; (v) whether he can offer an assurance that any current and future procurement projects which exceed 50 percent of the original contract value, will adhere to Regulation 14 of the Public Procurement Regulations 2006 and be re-tendered.

(AQW 8022/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Your question uses the term "Account NI procurement". This has been taken to mean the Account NI contract with PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) for consultancy support which was the subject

of the recent PAC hearing. This is not to be confused with the contract for the delivery of the Account NI programme.

When the contract with PwC was extended, my Department sought advice and guidance from the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD). The guidance provided assurance that appropriate steps were being taken to ensure that extensions were fully compliant with procurement legislation and demonstrated value for money.

I do not believe my Department has breached any EU Legislation. The NIAO report infers that compliance with procurement regulations, EU legislation and value for money could have been better demonstrated had separate procurement exercises been undertaken but does not assert that any EU Legislation was actually breached.

Additional finance was required to cover the increased consultancy costs to support the development of Account NI. While there was always an acceptance that this reform programme would be underpinned with strategic and specialist consultancy support, more was deployed than originally envisaged largely because the Department was unable to secure sufficiently skilled resources internally. The period over which consultancy support was needed was also longer than originally intended because of additional time needed to refine the technical specification during the procurement phase and to ensure that the optimal technical solution was developed prior to rolling out to Departments.

The Department does not dispute that significantly more consultancy was required than originally envisaged back in April 2002 but disagrees with use of the term 'overrun'. The NIAO definition states that "A contract is not considered to have encountered an overrun where the original contract made provision for an extension". The original consultancy contract clearly stated that it was to run for three years with options to extend at six monthly intervals until the Account NI project was completed. This was made clear to all potential bidders. Subsequent extensions were carefully managed in line with relevant procurement procedures and guidance with appropriate approvals having been sought and secured.

I can give an assurance that all current and future procurement projects will adhere to the Public Procurement Regulations (2006) as amended in all respects. The use of Regulation 14 will only be permitted if the prescribed conditions apply and the standard approach will be that contracts which have reached their published value or term will be retendered unless there are unforeseen circumstances that satisfy the Reg 14 conditions.

Procurement and E-Procurement Systems

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether the current procurement system and e-procurement systems within the Civil Service allow Departments, and their arm's-length bodies, to purchase using the 'buy it now' feature on eBay marketplace, given that the products advertised on eBay are often less expensive than the same products from other suppliers.

(AQW 8023/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The current procurement and eprocurement systems do not facilitate the use of the 'buy it now' feature on e-bay. This is because the feature requires payment to be made in advance and offers limited protection against supplier default or in the event of receipt of faulty goods. There is also insufficient assurance on the appropriate sourcing of goods and on the degree to which Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy objectives would be met.

Job Losses: Construction Industry

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an estimate of the number of construction jobs that have been lost as a result of the economic downturn to date.

(AQW 8054/11-15)

Mr Wilson: It is not possible to provide an estimate of the number of construction jobs that have been lost as a result of the economic downturn to date. However figures from the Northern Ireland Quarterly Employment Survey can be used to estimate the net change in employee jobs over the period.

The latest available figures indicate that at September 2011 there were 32,830 construction sector jobs in Northern Ireland, representing a fall of 13,990 jobs (30%) since the construction series peaked in December 2007.

Civil Service: Recruitment

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many new staff have been recruited by each Department in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8068/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Information on staff appointments to the Northern Ireland Civil Service has been published in annual reports on the website www.nicsrecruitment.gov.uk for the financial years 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2010 and for the period 1 January 2010 to 1 May 2011 at the following link [http://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/Analysis of NICS Recruitment Competitions 01Apr09 - 31Dec10.pdf](http://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/Analysis%20of%20NICS%20Recruitment%20Competitions%2001Apr09%20-%2031Dec10.pdf) The information includes occupational groups, gender, community background and declared disability however it not disaggregated by Department as the data is not captured in that way.

Questions for Written Answer: Stationery Costs

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much his Department has spent on stationery costs in replying to Assembly Written Questions, including the price of the envelopes and paper used, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8117/11-15)

Mr Wilson: My Department does not routinely estimate the cost of answering Assembly Questions. In addition, stationery costs specifically incurred to respond to Assembly Questions cannot readily be disaggregated from the overall stationery expenditure.

Mortgage and Debt Arrears

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 7513/11-15, and in light of his recent letter to the Governor of the Bank of England requesting regional lending statistics, whether he has given any consideration to requesting information on mortgage and debt arrears.

(AQW 8195/11-15)

Mr Wilson: No, I have not given consideration to requesting information on mortgages and debt arrears. DFP has no role in relation to either mortgage or debt arrears.

My discussions with the Bank of England have focussed on issues affecting bank lending to SMEs in Northern Ireland, including future regulatory requirements on banks, the operation of current and forthcoming financial initiatives, and regional bank lending data for SMEs.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Domiciliary Care: Unmet Need

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to provide an estimate of the level of unmet need in relation to the provision of domiciliary care; and (ii) to detail how his Department arrived at this estimate.

(AQW 7707/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): It is assumed that this question refers to the total number of people who are currently waiting in either a community or hospital setting for domiciliary care.

With regards to those waiting in a community setting, information is available on the number of persons for whom a care management assessment has been completed, but who are waiting on 31 December

2011 while a care package is being arranged by their Trust, due to no capacity in any of the appropriate domiciliary care providers. This information is detailed by HSC Trust in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1

HSC Trust	Number of persons waiting in community setting due to 'no capacity in any of the appropriate domiciliary providers' *
Belfast	3
Northern	22
South Eastern	0
Southern	1
Western	1
Total	27

Source: CC5b Community Information Return

* Figures are provisional and may be subject to change.

On 31 December 2011, 27 persons were waiting at home or in another community setting while a care package was being arranged by their Trust because there was no capacity in any of the appropriate domiciliary providers.

With regards to those waiting in a hospital setting, information is not available on the current level of unmet need in relation to the provision of domiciliary care, and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. However, information is available on the number of patients discharged from an acute hospital setting during January 2012, who waited longer than the agreed maximum waiting time for discharge due to no capacity in domiciliary care providers. This information is detailed by the patients HSC Trust of residence in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2

HSC Trust of Residence	Number of Delayed Discharges due to 'no capacity in domiciliary care providers'
Belfast	9
Northern	18
South Eastern	2
Southern	1
Western	7
Other (Not recorded / Non NI resident)	0
Total	37

Source: Admissions & Discharges Universe

During January 2012, 37 (0.2% of all discharges from acute hospitals in January 2012) discharges waited longer than the agreed maximum waiting time for discharge because there was no capacity in domiciliary care providers.

Cardiac Ablation Procedures

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that cardiac ablation procedures are not carried out by the Health Service, despite the fact that a number of our surgeons are qualified to do so (i) whether patients who need this procedure must travel to Britain; and (ii) how this represents value for money.

(AQW 7753/11-15)

Mr Poots: I assume this question relates to a specific type of cardiac ablation namely Pulmonary Venous Isolation (PVI). At present, all clinically supported referrals for this procedure are referred to NHS providers in Great Britain.

Discussions took place in 2007 regarding the potential to introduce a local PVI service. At that time there were issues regarding the volume of service required for a population of 1.8m and the need to adhere to national guidance in respect of numbers of procedures to support skills retention. It was therefore agreed that PVI would be commissioned on an extra contractual referral basis.

In November 2011, the Health and Social Care Board received an outline proposal from a number of cardiologists to provide the service in Northern Ireland and, I understand, the Belfast Trust is currently in the process of preparing a business case for this service, for submission to the Board for consideration.

Civil Service: Posts

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Civil Service posts existed in his Department at (i) Administrative Assistant; (ii) Administrative Officer; (iii) Executive Officer 2; (iv) Executive Officer 1; (v) Staff Officer; (vi) Deputy Principal; (vii) Grade 7; and (viii) Grade 6 levels, at the beginning of (a) 2007; and (b) 2012, broken down by local Council area.

(AQW 7802/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information is not available in precisely the form requested. The table below shows staff in post at May 2007 and January 2012.

Staff in Post	G6	G7	DP	SO	E01	E02	AO	AA	Total
May 2007	27	91	163	176	115	129	113	126	940
January 2012	16	84	148	144	60	74	59	46	631

The number of posts (as opposed to staff in post) at January 2012, by District Council area, is shown in the table below. The information includes analogous (i.e. professional and specialist) grades:

Council Area	G6	G7	DP	SO	E01	E02	AO	AA	Total
Castlereagh	16	91	148	144	60	73	58	48	638
Belfast	1					1	2		4
Derry			1	1					2
Total	17	91	149	145	60	74	60	48	644

Home Start: Funding

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the level of additional funding allocated to each Home Start group in this financial year.

(AQW 7809/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- 1 The level of additional funding allocated to each Home Start Group in 2011-12 is detailed in the following table. These figures represent resources allocated in addition to the Service Level Funding Agreements that the Home Start Groups have with each Trust Area.

HSC Trust	Home Start Group	Additional Funding Allocated 2011-12*
NHSCT	Antrim	£2,730
SEHSCT	Downe	£17,136
SHSCT	Banbridge	£10,302.62
SHSCT	Armagh/Dungannon	£12,606
SHSCT	Newry/Mourne	£10,000
SHSCT	Craigavon/Banbridge	£8,500

*As at 10 February 2012

Fuel: DHSSPS Spend

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much his Department, and its arm's-length bodies, spent on fuel in each of the last five years.

(AQW 7970/11-15)

Mr Poots: Expenditure on fuel (petrol and diesel) for the Department and its arms-length bodies is provided in the following table:

Financial Year	Expenditure
2010-11	£5,063,841
2009-10	£4,342,470

Information for 2006/07 – 2008/09 can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Shared Services: Expenditure

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the amount spent on new computer services in each of the last three years, at each of the sites proposed for amalgamation under the Shared Services proposal.

(AQW 7976/11-15)

Mr Poots: Expenditure on new computer services in connection with the Shared Services sites amounts to approximately £47,000 over the past three years.

Northern Health and Social Care Trust: Recruitment

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the recruitment for the post of Day Opportunities Manager in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area, to provide details of the (i) advertisement for the post; (ii) the short-listing process; (iii) interview panel; (iv) number of applications received; and (v) selection criteria used to determine the successful candidate.

(AQW 7983/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Trust recently recruited two posts for Day Opportunities Manager. The details of the 'Senior Day Opportunities Co-ordinator post', are outlined below.

(i) Advertisement for the post

The post was internally trawled to existing staff as part of vacancy controls.

(ii) Short-listing process

Each applicant was required to complete an application form and provided with a Job Description and Personnel Specification. The Personnel Specification contains details of the required Qualifications and Experience required for the post (as well as other areas such as Knowledge and Skills and Aptitudes to be assessed at interview). Those candidates who best demonstrated on their application form that they had the required Qualifications and Experience (see relevant Personnel Specification provided) were called for interview.

(iii) Interview Panel

The short-listing and interview was carried out by three panel members from the Mental Health Directorate. All panel members have been trained in Recruitment and Selection techniques. This Panel comprised of the Senior Manager responsible for the Day Opportunities Programme and two Locality Managers.

(iv) Number of applications

Nine

(v) Selection criteria

The areas detailed on the relevant Personnel Specification below were assessed at interview: qualifications and experience; knowledge, skills and aptitudes; special circumstances, that is, willing and able to work flexible hours as the service demands which will involve weekend work, night duty and work in other Units and; Health Requirements – an acceptable attendance record and general good health for the demands of the post.

Appointment was made in accordance with the merit principle i.e. best performance at interview.

Integrated Care Partnerships

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the creation and operation of Integrated Care Partnerships.

(AQW 7998/11-15)

Mr Poots: Integrated Care Partnerships are an important component of the future model of health and social care set out in Transforming Your Care. The Partnerships would join together the full range of health and social care services in each area, including GPs, community health, and social care providers, hospital specialists and representatives from the independent and voluntary sector. They would have a role in determining the needs of local populations and planning and delivering local services. I expect the Partnerships to be developed and start operation during 2012/13.

Bronchial Challenge Test

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety which hospitals have suitably qualified personnel to carry out a bronchial challenge test.

(AQW 8013/11-15)

Mr Poots: A bronchial challenge test is a medical test used to assist in the diagnosis of asthma.

I can advise that the following hospitals have suitably qualified personnel able to carry out a bronchial challenge test:

- Royal Victoria
- Belfast City
- Mater
- Craigavon Area
- Altnagelvin

Northern Ireland Electronic Care Record Outline Business Case: Software Companies

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the outline requirements provided to the four relevant software companies listed in the August 2011 Northern Ireland Care Record Outline Business Case; (ii) the criteria under which the companies were selected; (iii) the selection process undertaken; (iv) the date the companies received the outline requirement; (v) the length of time the companies were given to submit estimates of the (a) electronic care record application software; (b) interface development; (c) implementation costs; and (d) support costs; and (vi) the names of the four software companies.

(AQW 8018/11-15)

Mr Poots: In February 2011, four companies were selected to provide indicative costs to inform the Northern Ireland Electronic Care Record (ECR) Outline Business Case. The outline requirements provided covered ECR functionality; Solution Architecture; Security, Confidentiality, Access and Audit; Data Quality; and Supplier Services.

The companies concerned had previously bid for the ECR Proof of Concept Project in June 2009 and were the top scoring bids received in the pre qualification process.

The high level scoping requirement for indicative costing was sent to suppliers on 17 January 2011 with a deadline of 21 February 2011 to submit their costs for the ECR application software, interface development, implementation and support.

The companies which completed the high level scoping requirement were Orion Health, CSAM, DbMotion and Intersystems.

Northern Ireland Electronic Care Record Outline Business Case: Software Companies

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the resources provided to the four software companies, listed in the August 2011 Northern Ireland Care Record Outline Business Case, by the (a) Health and Social Care Trusts; (b) his Department; and (c) NI Electronic Care Record Proof Of Concept Team to produce their estimates for Electronic Care Record application software, interface development, implementation costs and support costs; (ii) the contact that any of the four companies had with the Health and Social Care Trusts carrying this business case forward after the completion of the outline Business Case; (iii) whether the tender for the Electronic Care Records Programme will be restricted to one, some or all of the four software companies; and (iv) to detail the current stage of the tender process of the project.

(AQW 8019/11-15)

Mr Poots: The four companies selected to provide indicative costs to inform the Northern Ireland Electronic Care Record (ECR) Outline Business Case were provided with a high level scoping requirement and Electronic Care Record costs template. No other resources were provided.

The ECR system implemented during the Proof of Concept Project is still being utilised. The project team is therefore in contact with the provider to maintain the system. The Proof of Concept provider is one of the companies that were asked to provide indicative costs for the Outline Business Case. There was also limited market research contact with all of the companies, which ceased prior to the commencement of the procurement process.

The tender process for the ECR was not limited to any one company and is following a procurement process using the "HSCNI Technology Partner Agreement Framework Contract" with Hewlett Packard. The project is currently in dialogue with shortlisted bidders.

Hospitality: Spend

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what has been the total spend on hospitality by his Department in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8074/11-15)

Mr Poots: Hospitality costs for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety are shown below.

2006/07 £	2007/08 £	2008/9 £	2009/10 £	2010/11 £
180,700	137,400	196,700	104,800	69,200

Kinship Care

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the publication of the 'Standards for Kinship Foster Carers in Northern Ireland' document, and the associated regional policies and procedures document.

(AQW 8101/11-15)

Mr Poots: Work is ongoing to finalise guidance and standards for kinship foster carers to take account of responses to consultation. My Department intends to publish the standards in April 2012. Work is also continuing on the development of regional kinship foster care policies and procedures. This work is being led by the Health and Social Care Board.

Dental Services: Savings Proposals

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 7525/11-15, to detail (i) the core services that will be available under his savings proposals; (ii) whether he can offer an assurance that, following the implementation of the core services, no child will be denied access to dental services; and (iii) for his assessment of whether the savings proposals will have a detrimental impact upon a child's dental health.

(AQW 8114/11-15)

Mr Poots: Treatments available under the health service in Northern Ireland are outlined in the Statement of Dental Remuneration. All of the treatments would remain available, where clinically necessary. However the criteria for providing the treatments below would change:

- Endodontic treatments on molar teeth would require mandatory prior approval;
- Cobalt chrome dentures may only be provided with prior approval;
- Large bridges and/or those in the back of the mouth will require mandatory prior approval; and
- Veneers would require mandatory prior approval.

Dentists would still be able to commence endodontic treatments on molar teeth necessary for the immediate relief of pain without prior approval.

The current contractual arrangements between the HSC Board and General Dental Practitioners mean that neither my Department nor the HSC Board can compel dentists to register or treat patients unless they wish to do so. However, as noted in AQW 7525, there are more dentists than ever in Northern Ireland and we currently enjoy the highest ever rate for children registered with dental practitioners. I will continue to ensure that access to dental services for all patients is a priority.

I do not consider that these proposals would have a detrimental impact on the oral health of children or adults in Northern Ireland. Where clinically necessary, dental practitioners would still be able to provide all of the treatments currently available under the Statement of Dental Remuneration.

Oral Cancer: Human Papilloma Virus Vaccination

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will consider providing the human papilloma virus mouth cancer vaccination for boys.

(AQW 8123/11-15)

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 groups should be offered vaccination.

The Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccine was introduced for girls in 2008. The vaccine protects against the two types of HPV which cause over 70% of cases of cervical cancer.

At that time, JCVI did not recommend vaccinating boys, as it was not cost-effective. JCVI stated that since vaccine efficacy is high, if there was a high uptake in girls then vaccinating boys would not provide any additional benefit to the prevention of cervical cancer.

At the time of recommendation, JCVI considered that there was insufficient evidence on the protective effects of the vaccine against cancers affecting males such as anal, and head and neck cancers.

I continue to be guided by the recommendations of JCVI.

Stereotactic Ablative Radiotherapy

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients have been refused a referral for stereotactic ablative radiotherapy to another part of the UK in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8143/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust have informed me that patients for whom stereotactic radiotherapy is clinically indicated are referred for this treatment via the Extra Contractual Referral mechanism to a Health Care provider in another part of the UK.

Information on the number of patients, who within this context have been declined a referral for stereotactic ablative radiotherapy to another part of the UK, in each of the last three years, is not collected centrally. The Belfast HSC Trust have also informed me that it is not possible to acquire this information from an assessment of patients case note files as there is no mechanism to identify the potential pool of patients for whom there may have been a discussion on stereotactic radiotherapy.

Stereotactic Ablative Radiotherapy

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients have been referred for stereotactic ablative radiotherapy to another part of the UK in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8144/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of patients transferred by the HSC in Northern Ireland for stereotactic ablative radiotherapy in another part of the UK, in each of the last three years, is outlined in the table below.

	Year		
	2009	2010	2011
Number of patients transferred to another part of the UK for stereotactic ablative radiotherapy	21	30	56

Source: Health and Social Care Board

Hospitals: Newbuild in Enniskillen

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the process that was followed to name the new hospital in Enniskillen; (ii) what level of public consultation took

place; (ii) the short-listed names that were submitted to his Department for approval by the Western Health and Social Care Trust; and (iv) the reasons for choosing the name agreed.

(AQW 8165/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) A competition was launched which included seeking suggestions from Trust staff and established staff and community fora. Pre-set criteria and a selection panel were established. A total of 76 names were suggested, which when assessed against the pre-set criteria, resulted in a short-list of names being drawn up by the selection panel and provided to me for consideration in coming to a final decision.
- (ii) Consultation was undertaken by the Western Trust as part of the competition. As well as staff involved in the development of the new hospital, members of established forums, made up of staff and community representatives, were invited to submit entries for the new name
- (iii) The short-listed names provided by the Trust were:
- Beechview Hospital;
 - Greenlands Hospital;
 - Silveroak Hospital;
 - Silverwood Hospital
- (iv) I made the final decision taking into account a number of considerations around the suitability of a name, taking account of my desire to have some connection with the location. I considered the names in the short-list and subsequently all of the 76 names that had been submitted as part of the consultation process before making my final decision. The name South West Acute Hospital was one of the 76 suggested names.

Muscular Dystrophy Duchene

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have been diagnosed with Muscular Dystrophy Duchene in each Health and Social Care Trust area, in each of the last 12 years.

(AQW 8170/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of people diagnosed with Muscular Dystrophy Duchene in Northern Ireland is not available.

Information is available on the number of admissions to Health and Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland with a diagnosis of Muscular Dystrophy. The number of admissions to Health and Social Care Hospitals in Northern Ireland from 1999/00 to 2010/11 where a diagnosis of Muscular Dystrophy was recorded in any diagnostic position is shown in the table below:

Year	HSC Trust					Total
	Belfast	Northern	South Eastern	Southern	Western	
1999/00	36	*	*	15	12	74
2000/01	40	*	*	6	14	69
2001/02	37	9	7	11	10	74
2002/03	27	*	11	9	*	56
2003/04	19	*	19	*	17	66
2004/05	18	10	8	*	*	46
2005/06	22	*	11	*	10	51

Year	HSC Trust					
	Belfast	Northern	South Eastern	Southern	Western	Total
2006/07	20	6	9	13	10	58
2007/08	22	*	*	13	11	52
2008/09	20	*	*	12	32	76
2009/10	24	*	*	11	32	76
2010/11	25	7	24	14	35	105

Source: Hospital Inpatient System

* In line with branch policy, cell sizes less than 5 have been masked to protect patient confidentiality. Where it is possible to calculate the value from the total, the next smallest cell size has also been masked.

Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises: DHSSPS Spend

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much his Department has spent on conferences, away-days and team building exercises in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8187/11-15)

Mr Poots: Departmental expenditure on conferences, away-days and team building exercises in each of the last 3 years is shown in the table below:

DHSSPS EXPENDITURE ON CONFERENCES, AWAY-DAYS AND TEAM BUILDING - }

2008/09 – 2010/11

Year	Expenditure
2008/09	£391,923
2009/10	£187,066
2010/11	£164,114

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis Specialists

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME) specialists are currently employed by the Health Service; (ii) which hospitals have an ME unit; and (iii) whether there is provision for people with ME to travel outside Northern Ireland to receive treatment.

(AQW 8191/11-15)

Mr Poots: In Northern Ireland Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS)/ME patients have access to a wide range of treatment and support services in primary, secondary and community settings, including specialist medical, paediatric, neurology and mental health services, depending on their individual needs.

A Consultant Physician with a specialist interest in CFS/ME provides a Chronic Fatigue Clinic each Friday morning at the Belfast City Hospital and takes referrals from across Northern Ireland.

Where a clinical need has been identified for treatment which cannot be provided in Northern Ireland, subject to the HSC Board approval as an individual funding request, appropriate patients may receive treatment outside Northern Ireland

Dermatology Appointment: Waiting Times

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) why the waiting time for a routine dermatology appointment is approximately 42 weeks in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area; (ii) what is being done to reduce this waiting time; and (iii) what are the current waiting times in other Trust areas.

(AQW 8193/11-15)

Mr Poots: The waiting times for a routine dermatology appointment at the Northern HSC Trust are due to the high level of demand for the service. 6714 appointments are required annually against the annual capacity available of 4312.

The Northern HSC Trust plans to continue the use of Independent Sector in the next financial to reduce this waiting time. The Trust is also discussing recurrent funding with the HSC Board to increase capacity at the dermatology service.

Waiting times for the dermatology specialty across all Trusts as at 31 December 2011 are given in the table below.

HSC Trust	Patients Waiting for an Appointment at the Dermatology Specialty, by Weeks Waiting						Total Waiting
	0-6	>6-9	>9-13	>13-21	>21-26	>26	
Belfast	813	279	412	623	357	1,506	3,990
Northern	542	142	171	383	258	2,439	3,935
South Eastern	551	214	197	355	86	69	1,472
Southern	732	340	396	765	440	44	2,717
Western	474	74	3	0	0	0	551
Northern Ireland	3,112	1,049	1,179	2,126	1,141	4,058	12,665

Cancer: Prevention, Treatment and Care

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what data is being collected on the Health and Social Care Trusts compliance with Standards 31 and 32 of the Service Framework for Cancer Prevention, Treatment and Care, in relation to children's and young people's cancers.

(AQW 8196/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Service Framework for Cancer Prevention, Treatment and Care was launched for the purpose of implementation planning in February 2011. While it has not yet been possible to establish the current position for Standards 31 and 32, funding has been secured to enable the collection of baseline data. It is anticipated that this will be completed by December 2012.

Cancer: Prevention, Treatment and Care

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to what extent the Health and Social Care Trusts are complying with Standards 31 and 32 of the Service Framework for Cancer Prevention, Treatment and Care, in relation to children's and young people's cancers.

(AQW 8197/11-15)

Mr Poots: While it has not yet been possible to establish the current position for Standards 31 and 32, funding has been secured to enable the collection of baseline data. It is anticipated that this will be completed by December 2012.

Coeliac Disease: Diagnosis

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have been diagnosed with coeliac disease in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8208/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of people diagnosed with coeliac disease in Northern Ireland is not available.

The only information held by the Department in relation to coeliac disease is the number of patients admitted to hospital for inpatient or day case care with a diagnosis of coeliac disease; these data have been tabled below.

Financial Year	No. of Admissions
2006/07	581
2007/08	636
2008/09	662
2009/10	729
2010/11	890

Source: Hospital Inpatients System.

Coeliac Disease: Support

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what support his Department offers to people with coeliac disease in relation to (i) diet management; and (ii) obtaining gluten-free food.

(AQW 8210/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) All patients who are newly diagnosed with coeliac disease are referred to a dietitian who will provide them with diet management advice. Following this initial intervention the patient is offered a dietary review at 3 and 6 months as clinically required, and beyond this they are offered access to an annual review/group session depending on local commissioned services.
- (ii) Patients can obtain a range of gluten-free food products on prescription from their GP. To ensure efficient use of resources the HSC Board has issued guidance to prescribers recommending that only staple foods should be supplied to patients diagnosed with gluten-sensitive enteropathies on prescription. The guidance also recommended that items which are not staple foods, and which are not consistent with healthy eating advice, such as biscuits and cakes, should no longer be available on prescription.

Cancer: Patient Data

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what data his Department collects on people, aged 16-24, with cancer.

(AQW 8217/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Department collects region wide information relating to the number of admissions to hospital where a diagnosis of cancer has been recorded (which is held within the Hospital Inpatient System (HIS)). The HIS is a patient level dataset that contains information relating to the patient's age and as such it is possible to identify the number of cancer related admissions for patients aged 16-24.

The Health Survey for Northern Ireland, which is an annual DHSSPS survey, collects limited information relating to cancer. It asks respondents if they have ever been told by a doctor that they had certain

medical conditions, one of which is cancer. This information can be broken down by age, however should only be used within the context of the health survey.

Other cancer information that is collected by the Department such as the GP register of patients with a diagnosis of cancer (from the Quality Outcomes Framework) and waiting times for cancer treatment cannot be disaggregated by age therefore it is not possible to separately identify patients aged 16-24.

Nursing Care: Cost

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average weekly cost of providing care for a patient (i) in a hospital; (ii) in a state-run nursing home; (iii) in a privately run nursing home; and (iv) in their own home.

(AQW 8225/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is not possible to compare accurately the average cost of a hospital or nursing home place with an average domiciliary care package. An average nursing home place, with care available 24 hours a day 7 days a week, is much more intensive than an average domiciliary care package. In addition, the needs of each patient vary extensively depending on their care requirements. Whilst it is often the case that supporting people at home is more cost effective, there is a point at which a person's needs can be so great that domiciliary care can be more expensive than nursing home care.

Pseudomonas: Water Tanks

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 7270/11-15, to detail the results of the tests on the water tanks serving the (i) Royal Jubilee Maternity Unit; and (ii) neonatal unit at Altnagelvin Hospital.

(AQW 8237/11-15)

Mr Poots: The results of the tests are at the Royal Jubilee Maternity Hospital and the neonatal unit at Altnagelvin are as follows:

BELFAST TRUST – ROYAL JUBILEE MATERNITY HOSPITAL

	Pseudomonas Result (count /100ml)	TVC Result (count/100ml)	
		22o	37o
Water Storage Tank Supply	<1	<1	<1
Mains Supply to Tank	<1	<1	<1

WESTERN TRUST - ALTNAGELVIN HOSPITAL SOUTH WING (NEONATAL UNIT)

	Pseudomonas Result (count /100ml)	TVC Result (count/100ml)	
		22o	37o
Water Storage Tank 1	<1	<1	<1
Water Storage Tank 2	<1	<1	<1
Mains Supply to Tank 1	<1	<1	<1
Mains Supply to Tank 2	<1	<1	<1

Cancer: Prevention, Treatment and Care

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) when he will publish the implementation plan for the Service Framework for Cancer Prevention, Treatment and Care; and (ii) whether there will be a public consultation on the plan.

(AQW 8239/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) The implementation plan has been developed jointly by the HSC Board and Public Health Agency, and will be considered by my Department's Service Framework Programme Board in March 2012. Thereafter, arrangements for publication will fall to the HSC Board and Public Health Agency.
- (ii) As The Service Framework for Cancer Prevention, Treatment and Care was the subject of widespread formal consultation, across all aspects of the service including service users and carers as well as the voluntary sector, there will be no public consultation on the implementation plan.

Invoices: Late Payment

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the number of invoices paid late by Health and Social Care Trusts (i) whether any Trust has incurred legal fees as a result of claims, under the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998, as extended by the Late Payment of Commercial Debts Regulations 2002; and if so, the level of legal fees incurred by each Trust; and (ii) whether further legal fees relating to on-going or future claims are expected.

(AQW 8242/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) The Southern HSC Trust is the only trust to have incurred legal fees as a result of claims under the late payment of commercial debts legislation. The level of fees incurred to date is £193.
- (ii) At present, none of the trusts is anticipating any further expenditure on legal fees.

Transforming Your Care: Compton Review

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his Department's assessment of the Compton Review.

(AQW 8244/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Report of the Health and Social Care Services Review, Transforming Your Care, presents a compelling case for change. The Report provides a framework for a future model of integrated health and social care which should be safe, resilient and sustainable. The model rightly places the patient and not the institutions of health and social care at the centre, and supports individuals to care for themselves and make good health choices.

Transforming Your Care: Compton Review

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how his Department intends to measure the goals set out in the Compton Review, particularly the (i) better prevention of ill health; and (ii) provision of patient-centred care.

(AQW 8245/11-15)

Mr Poots: I intend that progress across the various workstreams required to deliver the future model of health and social care will be overseen by a Strategic Programme Board chaired by the Permanent Secretary of the Department and reporting to me. The need to be better at preventing ill-health and the importance of patient centred care are two of eleven reasons for change presented in Transforming Your Care. The implementation of the new model in response to the reasons for change and the oversight of progress towards successful delivery across the workstreams will be a role for the Programme Board. Better prevention of ill health and provision of patient-centred care will a focus for the work.

Transforming Your Care: Compton Review

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his Department's timescale for implementing the changes set out in the Compton Review.

(AQW 8246/11-15)

Mr Poots: To reflect the magnitude and complexity of the changes proposed the Report on the Review of Health and Social Care, Transforming Your Care, recommended an implementation timescale of 5 years. I support this view of the timescale necessary for implementing all the changes required.

Ballymena Health and Care Centre: Services

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what services will be available at the new Ballymena Health and Care Centre.

(AQW 8301/11-15)

Mr Poots: The new health and care centre in Ballymena will provide a wide ranging mix of acute, primary and community care services to the local population. The locally accessible services will include GP Practices, diagnostic services, community services, speech and language services, physiotherapy services, challenging behaviour services and community addictions unit.

In addition to the above, other teams will provide clinics and services from the new health and care centre, for example ICATs clinics, the Eating Disorder Team and Physical Disability Team. An Out of Hours Service – Doctor Urgent Care will also be provided from the centre.

Discussions are ongoing about relocating the Citizens Advice Bureau to the new health and care centre.

Shared Services: Implementation Timescale

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the timescale for the implementation of the proposed Shared Services.

(AQW 8335/11-15)

Mr Poots: The current planning assumption is that implementation of Phase 1 of Shared Services will begin on a phased basis as soon as practicably possible in the latter half of 2012.

Patient Care: Location

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to transfer some of the patient care available in hospitals to the community; and the timescale for any such changes.

(AQW 8343/11-15)

Mr Poots: Transforming Your Care presents a model for the future delivery of health and social care which recommends a shift of care from hospital settings into the community. Key changes which would be seen in the community would include more care delivered in the home; changing care packages for people in nursing homes; increased role of the GP; and increased use of community and social care services. There would be a shift in the share of resources from the hospital sector to the primary and community care sector. To reflect the magnitude and complexity of the changes proposed, Transforming Your Care recommends an implementation timescale of five years to deliver all the changes required.

Ageing Population

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how he intends to the address issue of an ageing population and a resulting over-reliance on hospital beds.

(AQW 8344/11-15)

Mr Poots: Our ageing population and the associated challenges it presents have been well documented. In response to this challenge my Department has been developing a wide range of

flexible, person-centred and responsive domiciliary care services. These services enable older people, who are assessed as needing social care, to have a say as to the type of service they receive and as far as practicable to choose the setting in which their care is delivered. Moreover, all Trusts have intermediate care and other step-up, step-down services which are community-based settings in which patients can be monitored, recuperate or be rehabilitated or reabled, so that their discharge from hospital can be as prompt as possible, or unnecessary admission avoided. The recommendations, made by 'Transforming Your Care', the recent report on the review of Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland, are fully consistent with my policy intentions in this area.

Patient Care: Location

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to what extent his Department currently offers patients the opportunity to receive treatment in a location of their choice, where possible; and whether such a provision is afforded within the Compton Review.

(AQW 8349/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is essential to ensure patients receive the right care, at the right time in the right place, with the best outcome. This can be in a hospital setting, a local health centre, a local GP surgery or in their own home, including the use of assistive technology. There are many benefits associated with delivering care within people's homes and in their local communities. Providing patient choice about where people are cared for is one of the central themes of the Report on the Review of Health and Social Care, Transforming Your Care.

Elderly Care: Location

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to what extent his Department currently offers elderly and other vulnerable people the opportunity to receive social care in a location of their choice, where possible; and whether such a provision is afforded within the Compton Review.

(AQW 8350/11-15)

Mr Poots: The demographic changes relating to our ageing population have been well documented. In response my Department has been developing a wide range of flexible, person-centred and responsive domiciliary care services. These services enable those people, regardless of their age or disability, who are assessed as needing social care, to be consulted about and have a say as to the type of service they receive, and as far as practicable to choose the setting in which their care is delivered.

'Transforming Your Care' has recommended a diverse choice of provision to meet the needs of older people, with appropriate regulation and safeguards to ensure quality and protect the vulnerable. The recommendations also include that the home should be the hub of care for older people, with more control for the service users over budgets, continued promotion of Direct Payments and a common approach to personalized budgets, with advocacy and brokerage support where required. Clearly these are all measures intended to offer greater choice, and fully consistent with my policy intentions.

Tyrone County Hospital: Booking Line

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many staff are employed to operate the booking line at Tyrone County Hospital; and whether there has been a change in the number of staff or hours of employment in the last 12 months.

(AQW 8370/11-15)

Mr Poots: Number of staff employed to operate the booking line at Tyrone County Hospital

Date	Headcount	WTE
February 2011	5	4.5
February 2012	6	5.5

Source: Western Health and Social Care Trust

Notes:

1 WTE = Whole-time Equivalent.

Multiple System Atrophy

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have been diagnosed with multiple system atrophy in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8401/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of people diagnosed with multiple system atrophy is not available.

Information is available on the number of patients admitted to hospital for inpatient or day case care with a diagnosis of Multi-system degeneration. The number of admissions to Health and Social Care Hospitals in Northern Ireland from 2006/07 to 2010/11 where a diagnosis of Multi-system degeneration was recorded in any diagnostic position is shown in the table below:

Financial Year	No. of Admissions
2006/07	8
2007/08	9
2008/09	12
2009/10	11
2010/11	12

Source: Hospital Inpatient System.

Multiple System Atrophy

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department has taken to address the increase in the number of people diagnosed with multiple system atrophy.

(AQW 8402/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department is currently developing policies which will benefit those with MSA and their carers, including a Physical and Sensory Disability Strategy and Action Plan, and a Policy Framework "Living with Long Term Conditions". In addition, the Health and Social Care Board is currently evaluating the implementation of the 2002 Review of Adult Neurology Services.

Furthermore, a Neurological Conditions Network has been established by my Department to ensure, through a multi-disciplinary and coordinated approach, the best possible outcomes for people with long term neurological conditions, such as MSA. The first phase, an innovative and ambitious engagement exercise, has been successfully completed and a set of recommendations has been developed based on the shared priorities identified.

Rare Diseases: Definition

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his Department's definition of rare diseases.

(AQW 8404/11-15)

Mr Poots: I can advise that my Department uses the definition of rare diseases agreed by the European Union (EU), namely that rare disease is one that affects no more than 5 people per 10,000 of the EU population. It can affect physical and/or mental health. This definition in the EU was adopted by the Community action programme on rare diseases 1999-2003. The same definition is set out in Regulation (EC) 141/2000 and is used by the European Commission for the designation of orphan drugs.

Rare Diseases: Update

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the work his Department has carried out on rare diseases.

(AQW 8405/11-15)

Mr Poots: I can advise that my officials have been liaising with counterparts in England, Scotland and Wales on a revised draft of the UK Plan for Rare Diseases, in order to finalize the Plan. While no decision has been taken about when the Plan will be consulted on publicly, it is expected that this will be agreed shortly.

Depression: North Down

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of incidents of depression per ward in the North Down area in each of the last 5 years.

(AQW 8477/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is not available.

Health Service: Complaints Procedure

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the complaints procedure for patients dissatisfied with the Health Service.

(AQW 8490/11-15)

Mr Poots: Complaints in HSC: Standards and Guidelines for Resolution and Learning was published in April 2009. A copy is available on <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/hsc-complaints-standards-guidelines-resolution-learning.pdf>

This complaints procedure is designed to provide ease of access and a supportive and open process. Our goal is to achieve local resolution of the vast majority of complaints, delivered both promptly and fairly. The process provides not only an opportunity to put things right for service users, but also an opportunity to improve services where weaknesses are discovered. There will be times when local resolution is not possible, and for those occasions the system also provides for a robust and fully independent review by the NI Commissioner of Complaints (the Ombudsman).

The operation of the complaints procedure is subject to ongoing monitoring and evaluation. My assessment of the effectiveness of the arrangements will be informed by the findings and recommendations of the HSC Board's evaluation of complaints processes, which is due to be published shortly, and by my Department's subsequent evaluation of outcomes.

Autism: Speech-generated Devices

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many speech generated devices are available for children with autism.

(AQW 8551/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is not available centrally within my Department, and could only be provided by Health and Social Care Trusts at disproportionate costs.

DHSSPS are leading in the development of a cross-departmental Autism Strategy which must be published by May 2013. All Departments and stakeholders are currently engaged in this process, the aim of which is to improve services and support for people with autism and their families and carers throughout their lives.

Department of Justice

Sexual Offender Treatment Programme

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, for each of the last three years, how many people, who were serving a custodial sentence for rape or sexual assault and were classed as being in ‘complete denial’, refused to participate in a Sexual Offender Treatment Programme during their sentence; and whether their refusal to co-operate with a programme was taken into account by the Parole Commissioners when considering their release from custody.

(AQW 7658/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): Table A, below, sets out the number of people serving a custodial sentence for rape or sexual assault in the last three years, who have been classed as being in denial, and have not participated in a Sexual Offender Treatment Programme.

TABLE A

Year	Number of sexual offenders in ‘complete denial’
2009	27
2010	30
2011	28

The figures, produced yearly, represent the total sexual offender population classed as being in denial during that calendar year, and are inclusive of people serving sentences from previous years.

The Northern Ireland Prison Service is required to provide the Parole Commissioners with all current and relevant information on each case they consider. However, the manner in which this information is used to inform decisions about release dates and/or licence conditions is a matter entirely for the Parole Commissioners.

Drugs: Couriers

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) whether acting as a courier for drug dealing, by either carrying drugs or cash, is a criminal offence under aiding and abetting criminal activity; (ii) if so, what is the penalty; and (iii) how many people have been convicted of this offence in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 7685/11-15)

Mr Ford: Drug couriers could be prosecuted for the offence of possessing a controlled drug (section 5(2) of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971) or of possessing a controlled drug with intent to supply it (under section 5(3) of that Act). In certain circumstances, carrying cash, whilst not an offence in itself, could be indicative of criminal activity such as drug dealing.

The maximum penalties available on conviction of these drug possession offences are as follows:

- (i) Simple possession
 - (a) Summary
 - Class A drug involved 6 months or £5000 or both.
 - Class B drug involved 3 months or £2,500, or both.
 - Class C drug involved 3 months or £1,000, or both.
 - (b) On indictment
 - Class A drug involved 7 years or a fine, or both.
 - Class B drug involved 5 years or a fine, or both.
 - Class C drug involved 2 years or a fine, or both.

(ii) Possession with intent

(a) Summary

Class A drug involved 6 months or £5000, or both.

Class B drug involved 6 months or £5000, or both.

Class C drug involved 3 months or £2,500, or both.

(b) On indictment

Class A drug involved Life or a fine, or both.

Class B drug involved 14 years or a fine, or both.

Class C drug involved 14 years or a fine, or both.

Aiding, abetting, counselling or procuring the commission of an indictable offence is itself an offence under the Accessories and Abettors Act 1861. It carries the same maximum penalties as are available upon conviction of the offence being aided, etc.

The table below gives the number of convictions for relevant drugs offences for the calendar years 1999 to 2008 (the latest year for which figures are currently available).

NUMBER OF CONVICTIONS FOR POSSESSION AND INTENT TO SUPPLY, 1999-2008

Year	Possession of a class A, B or C drug	Intent to supply a class A, B or C drug	Total
1999	428	81	509
2000	440	149	589
2001	304	128	432
2002	297	99	396
2003	377	90	467
2004	400	135	535
2005	457	114	571
2006	571	127	698
2007	699	135	834
2008	779	114	893

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

Data for 1999-2006 should not be directly compared with data from 2007 to 2008 as the data sets are sourced from different systems.

Recruitment Agencies: DOJ Spend

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Justice to detail the amount paid to recruitment agencies for (i) full-time; and (ii) part-time posts in his Department, and its arm's-length bodies, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 7756/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice (DOJ) came into existence on 12th April 2010 Therefore the amount paid to recruitment agencies for (i) full-time, and (ii) part-time posts in the Department can only be provided for 2010/11. Details of expenditure for the Department's arm's-length bodies (including

Agencies) can be provided for each of the last three years because they were stand alone bodies before the date of devolution.

RECRUITMENT AGENCY EXPENDITURE IS DETAILED IN THE TABLE BELOW.

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
DOJ	Nil	Nil	£186,812
Arm's-length bodies (including Agencies)	£1,673,882	£2,264,269	£1,459,458

Recruitment agency expenditure by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) has not been included. This may be obtained by contacting the PSNI directly.

It is not possible to show the split in full-time and part-time costs because of the way this expenditure is recorded on financial systems.

Prison Service Staff: Suspended from Duty

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether the incident, in which two Prison Service staff were suspended from duty over the payment of a prisoner's drug debts, was reported to the PSNI or the Public Prosecution Service for the possible criminal offence of wilful misconduct in public office.

(AQW 7767/11-15)

Mr Ford: The incident was not reported to the PSNI or the Public Prosecution Service.

Colin Bell: Death in Custody

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what undertakings were given by the Prison Officers Association and the Prison Service, in light of the report by Carol Ackah and Liam Deane into the death in custody of Colin Bell in 2008; and when these undertakings were implemented.

(AQW 7773/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Ackah and Deane Report recommended that the Northern Ireland Prison Service Code of Conduct and Discipline should be revised. This process was at an advanced stage when Dame Anne Owers recommended the development of a Code of Ethics and new disciplinary and appraisal system based on the Code. The Prison Service is currently drafting the Code of Ethics.

I have not been made aware of any undertakings given by the Prison Officers Association in respect of the Ackah and Deane Report.

Prisoners: Management of Separated Inmates

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the steps that have been taken to implement the agreement made by the Prison Service in August 2010 on the management of separated prisoners.

(AQW 7796/11-15)

Mr Ford: In line with the agreement of August 2010 NIPS has taken a number of steps which have led to significant improvements for separated republican prisoners in Roe House. These include:

- improved access to association in the recreation room, exercise yard and astro-turf pitch and the introduction of inter-cell association and communal dining for prisoners in Roe 3 and 4;
- a prisoner forum, established in August 2010;
- a review of search technology; and
- the introduction of significant changes to search arrangements which have eliminated the need for rub down searching on the landings (with the exception of Roe 4 where it has been necessary to

reintroduce rubdown searching in response to the actions of protesting prisoners on that landing), and removed the requirement for separated prisoners to be routinely full body searched within the prison.

- The installation of a new search facility, located within the separated complex, which enables prisoners entering or leaving Roe House to be searched by means of a full rub down search combined with the use of electronic devices including an airport style scanner, hand held metal detector, and BOSS Chair.

A detailed breakdown of the elements of the agreement, and action taken in relation to each is attached.

Whilst the requirement for full body searching has been significantly reduced, prisoners are still required to undergo a full body search on entry to and exit from the prison. I am satisfied that this requirement is consistent with the agreement, and I consider those elements of the agreement relating to searching to be implemented in full.

Despite these efforts to implement the agreement, a significant number of separated republican prisoners have chosen to re-engage in protest action. Consequently, these prisoners are currently subject to a restricted regime and are unable to avail of the full regime. In addition, a number of prisoners who are not participating in the dirty protest have nonetheless chosen not to avail of all of the facilities available.

Under the agreement, those elements relating to the relaxation of controlled movement were to be implemented on a phased basis, contingent on the fundamental principles of the agreement being upheld by both parties. Whilst both NIPS and I remain committed to this aim, it is difficult to see how further progress can be made on these elements in the context of ongoing protest action in Roe House.

Nevertheless, I remain committed to the full implementation of the agreement and to making every possible effort to resolve the current protest as soon as possible.

In addition to the steps taken under the agreement, NIPS has completed a further review of search technology, in line with a recommendation made by the Prison Review Team. I am currently considering the findings of that review.

ANNEX A

Issues	Status
Prisoner Forum	
An effective Prisoner Forum will be established	Actioned: Prisoner Forum was established in August 2010 to meet regularly on a monthly basis.
Searching	
No random full body searching will take place on the way to domestic and legal visits and the videolink or from the SSU	Actioned: Procedures revised.
No "rub-down" searching internally within Roe 3 and 4	Actioned: Unfortunately, in response to the ongoing protest action by prisoners on Roe 4, rub down searching has had to be re introduced internally on that landing. In line with the August agreement and the actions of prisoners on Roe 3, rub down searches are not carried out on that landing.

Issues	Status
<p>NIPS will introduce a new search facility and revised search policy for separated prisoners... which will remove the requirement for routine full-body searching of separated prisoners within the prison</p>	<p>Actioned: New search facility has been put in place, with a BOSS Chair installed and is operational. This new facility has removed the requirement for routine full-body searching within the prison. For security reasons there is still a requirement for full-body searching where a prisoner enters or exits the prison.</p>
<p>Where full body search is required because of positive indication or intelligence / suspicion it must be authorised and observed by a supervisor and carried out in a manner which is both sensitive and dignified. The process of searching will be audited and monitored to ensure it complies with human rights standards.</p>	<p>Actioned: Where searches are required they are authorised and observed by the Senior Officer. Searching now subject to auditing and monitoring</p>
<p>Review of full body searching to report by the end of September and agreed recommendations implemented as soon as possible</p>	<p>Actioned: The report was produced by the end of September 2010. However the subsequent independent competitive analysis of the review was delayed considerably due to availability of the independent reviewers. The review was published in January and made no additional recommendations for revisions to search practices in the context of separated prisoners. Subsequent Judicial Review of full body searching, specifically on entry and exit to the prison has ruled that the requirement is lawful and not incompatible with ECHR. In addition, in light of the recommendation by the PRT in its final report (Oct 2011) NIPS has conducted a further review of available and anticipated search technology. This review is now complete and its recommendations are being considered. HMP Holme has submitted an application, under the under the Justification of Practices involving Ionising Radiation Regulations 2004, for use of full body imaging scanners in UK prisons. NIPS is keeping abreast of developments in this area.</p>
<p>Oral searching</p>	<p>Actioned: Although not in the original agreement, in response to concerns raised by prisoners in December 2010, NIPS revised its Security Manual to make the requirement for an oral search (during rub down searches) discretionary rather than mandatory. Oral searches are now only required when there is a suspicion that a prisoner may be concealing an illicit item in his mouth.</p>

Issues	Status
Movement / association	
<p>Subject to the fundamental principles, NIPS's aim is to move from the existing arrangements towards a more progressive, supervised free-flow movement system within Roe House on a phased basis:</p>	<p>Ongoing: NIPS remains committed to this aim, and the full implementation of the agreement, subject to the fundamental principles being upheld.</p> <p>However progress towards this goal is – as the agreement makes clear – dependent on adherence to the fundamental principles.</p>
<p>Phase 1 – commencing August 2010:</p> <p>Association within the recreation room, yard and – when it is completed – the astro-turf pitch from 0830 until fifteen minutes before lock-up</p> <p>Considering the wing – for the purposes of movement – as one unit, rather than two landings, to permit a maximum of six prisoners on the landing at any one time, while other prisoners can have access to the kitchen, laundry room, classrooms, showers, ironing and haircutting room.</p>	<p>Actioned:</p> <p>Prior to the resumption of the protest, prisoners were given enhanced association within the recreation room, yard and astro-turf from 0830 until 15 minutes before lock-up.</p> <p>Revised arrangements for moving prisoners were also introduced.</p> <p>Prisoners' access to these facilities has been affected by the ongoing dirty protest. Those prisoners who are not engaging in dirty protest are nonetheless choosing not to use the recreation room..</p>
<p>Phase 2 – commencing December 2010:</p> <p>In addition to implementing the recommendations of the Prisoner Ombudsman's report and this agreement, NIPS will take steps to implement agreed recommendations from the Independent Review as quickly as possible</p>	<p>Ongoing:</p> <p>The Prison Review Team's interim report did not contain any specific recommendations on this.</p> <p>Subject to the fundamental principles, NIPS remains committed to the full implementation of the agreement.</p> <p>Whilst NIPS remains committed to the full implementation of the Agreement, it is difficult to see how further progress can be made in relation to moving towards more free-flow movement arrangements in the context of the current ongoing protest action by prisoners in Roe 3 and 4 which is a clear breach of the fundamental principles under the agreement.</p>
<p>Phase 3</p> <p>NIPS will continue to review and assess ways to further progress supervised free flow movement of prisoners. This will include implementing agreed recommendations – if any – contained in the final independent Prison Review Report.</p>	<p>Ongoing:</p> <p>NIPS remains committed to the agreement. However the agreement set out that the ability to progress, implement and maintain phased changes to movement procedures will be determined by adherence to the fundamental principles.</p> <p>It is difficult to make further progress at this stage in the context of prisoner protests and behaviours which undermine the fundamental principles of the agreement.</p>

Issues	Status
Inter-cell association	Actioned: Although not included in the agreement, Inter-cell association was made available to prisoners from 11 March 2011.
Other issues	
Assessment Team appointed for continuous monitoring and evidencing of the agreement	Actioned: Assessment Team have conducted assessments and briefed the Minister on a number of occasions.

Police: Part-time Reserve Gratuity Scheme

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice how many appeals in relation to the Part Time Reserve Gratuity Scheme were received; and how many were (i) successful; and (ii) unsuccessful.

(AQW 7839/11-15)

Mr Ford: 42 appeals have been received against the decision to refuse a gratuity payment on the basis of eligibility, or against the banding of a payment. Of these, 31 have been successful and 11 unsuccessful. (A further appeal against banding has been considered since AQW 6919.)

In addition, 29 appeals were received in respect of late applications.

Lawyers: Mileage Claims

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 7070/11-15, in light of his statement that Antrim is considerably closer to Belfast than Magherafelt, whether this has been taken into consideration for those who would have attended Magherafelt Courthouse, but now have to attend Antrim Courthouse.

(AQW 7876/11-15)

Mr Ford: Among the factors considered when developing proposals to transfer court business from Magherafelt Courthouse to Antrim Courthouse were: courtroom utilisation, fitness for purpose of the courthouse accommodation, the ability to transfer business to a suitable alternative venue with minimal disruption, the availability of suitable public transport and the travel time between court venues.

No decision has been taken on the transfer of Court business from Magherafelt to Antrim.

Prisons: Speech and Language Therapists

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Justice how many speech and language therapists currently work within the criminal justice system; and for his assessment of the adequacy of this provision.

(AQW 7909/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are no speech and language therapists directly employed within the criminal justice system. Where there is an assessed need, services are accessed through normal GP referral. This process can be slow and therapy may be provided after the person has moved on from the criminal justice system.

Due to the established links between communication difficulties and offending my Department works closely with the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT). Last month I spoke at a RCSLT seminar to highlight the communication and support needs of young offenders in Northern Ireland, reflecting the increasing awareness of speech and language communication difficulties and the support needs of victims, witnesses and offenders within the justice sector.

The RCSLT has been developing a new free, interactive e-learning tool (The Box) and through the Youth Justice Agency, Northern Ireland will be one of the first sites in the United Kingdom to assist in the

independent evaluation of the course. Following completion of the evaluation process, this tool will be available to all professionals in the justice sector.

Driving Offences: Drink

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice how many people, who had a previous drink-driving conviction, have been convicted of a drink-driving offence in each of the last five years.

(AQW 7922/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information requested is not available.

Court conviction datasets are not collated in the format which would allow for identification of previous disposals in the manner requested.

Driving Offences: Drink or Drugs

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice how many people, in each of the last five years, have been convicted of (i) causing death or grievous bodily injury by careless driving while under the influence of drink or drugs; (ii) driving or attempting to drive while unfit through drink or drugs; (iii) driving or attempting to drive with excess alcohol in the blood, breath or urine; (iv) failing to provide a specimen; (v) in charge of a vehicle while over the legal limit or unfit through drink or drugs; and (vi) refusing to provide a specimen of breath, blood or urine for analysis.

(AQW 7926/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below gives the number convicted for the calendar years 2004 to 2008 (the latest year for which figures are currently available). Number of people convicted for drink/drug driving offences

2004-2008

Offence Grouping	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
(i) causing death or GBI by driving carelessly with excess alcohol/when unfit	4	6	9	5	7
(i) causing death or GBI by inconsiderate driving with excess alcohol/when unfit	1	0	1	1	3
(ii) aiding and abetting/attempting/driving when unfit through drink or drugs	472	471	550	543	398
(iii) aiding and abetting/attempting/driving with excess alcohol in breath/blood/urine	1848	1927	1888	2252	1844
(iv) fail/failing to provide specimen	246	272	221	235	196
(v) in charge when unfit through drink or drugs/excess alcohol in blood/breath/urine	196	230	227	341	330
Total	2767	2906	2946	3377	2775

There are no convictions relating to refusals to provide a specimen. It is likely they would be prosecuted under 'Fail/Failing to provide a specimen'.

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

Data for 2004 to 2006 should not be directly compared with data from 2007 to 2008 as the data sets are sourced from different systems.

Prison Officers: Training for Night Custody Duties

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the suicide of Colin Bell in HMP Maghaberry on 31 August 2008, what training modules were delivered to night custody officers employed by the Prison Service; and what was the duration of these training programmes.

(AQW 7932/11-15)

Mr Ford: All Night Custody Officers, on joining the Prison Service, completed a four week basic training programme at the Prison Service College. This was further enhanced with a one week induction and familiarisation programme on arrival at their new establishment. Details of the training modules and their duration are attached as a separate annex.

Following the death of Colin Bell NIPS introduced Supporting Prisoners At Risk (SPAR) training for Night Custody Officers.

The SPAR process involves care planning for vulnerable prisoners, conducting conversational checks, use of observation cells and is delivered over one half day for managers and one and a half days for officers. In addition, NCOs are required to attend a two day Applied Suicide Intervention Skills training (ASIST) course. The suicide prevention delivery programme is prioritised to residential staff and is currently ongoing.

Mental Health Awareness training is available for Night Custody Officers at each prison establishment. In particular, Night Custody Officers detailed to the Donard landing also have responsibility for those prisoners who are particularly vulnerable. They have received a two day programme on engaging with and keeping safe those with mental health and challenging behavioural problems.

Annex A

Night Custody Officer Induction Training Programme –

20 days at Prison Service College.

Training modules:

- | | |
|--|---|
| ■ Control and restraint (basic) | ■ Hospital escort (theory) |
| ■ Adjudication procedures – theory /practical | ■ Human rights |
| ■ Bedwatch (theory) | ■ Incident Management |
| ■ Code of Conduct and Discipline (COCD) | ■ Introduction to assertiveness |
| ■ Use of handcuffs (COCD) | ■ Introduction to conditioning |
| ■ Handcuffs/escort – closeting chain | ■ Introduction to Hostage |
| ■ Cultural diversity | ■ Introduction to Search |
| ■ Equal opportunities | ■ Prison Security |
| ■ Equality | ■ Radio procedures |
| ■ Escort (theory) | ■ Report Writing |
| ■ Field trip to hospital (Belfast City Hospital) | ■ Security awareness |
| ■ First response | ■ Suicide Awareness |
| ■ Grievance procedures | ■ Transport of prisoner by secure van (practical) |
| ■ Hospital escort (practical) | ■ Working with healthcare professionals |

A further 5 days is delivered within their designated establishment prior to taking up post.

Prison Officers: Suicide Watch Training

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Justice to detail the specific training given to prison officers who are on suicide watch duty.

(AQW 7934/11-15)

Mr Ford: Any prisoner who is considered vulnerable or is at risk of self harm may be placed on the Supporting Prisoner at Risk process (SPAR) which involves setting up care plans and, if necessary, placing them in observation cells where they can be continuously observed or observed at agreed times.

All prison officers and managers who are involved in the management of the SPAR process have received specific training which includes care planning for vulnerable prisoners, conducting conversational checks and use of safer cells.

The duration of SPAR training is one day for managers and one and a half days for officers. In addition, all residential prison officers are required to attend the Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) suicide prevention programme. The duration of the ASIST programme is two days.

Colin Bell: Death in Custody

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Justice what additional training was given to Prison Officers, following the Prisoner Ombudsman's report on the death of Colin Bell in HMP Maghaberry.

(AQW 7935/11-15)

Mr Ford: Following the death of Colin Bell and in line with the Prisoner Ombudsman's report the Northern Ireland Prison Service developed and implemented a number of training interventions for prison officers.

Training includes the Supporting Prisoners At Risk (SPAR) process which covered training for staff in areas such as:

- Care Planning
- Conducting conversational checks
- Managing prisoners respectfully when placed in observation cells

Staff working on the Donard Landing (including Night Custody Officers) have been trained in skills specific to supporting and encouraging prisoners with challenging behavioural problems and those with mental health issues.

In addition, courses in mental health first aid are currently being delivered to residential staff as a priority training course. The Prison Service is committed to providing the Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) suicide awareness programme for all discipline staff.

Prisoners: Death by Suicide

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Justice how many prisoners have died by suicide in each of the past five years.

(AQW 7936/11-15)

Mr Ford: In the five year period from January 2007- January 2012 there have been a total of ten prisoner deaths which the Northern Ireland Prison Service has recorded as suicide. One of these deaths occurred at home, and one whilst in police custody.

All of these deaths have yet to be determined by a Coroner's Inquest.

Human Resources

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Justice how many staff are employed in his Department's Human Resources section.

(AQW 7940/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice and its Agencies employ 156.54 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff members below SCS in its Human Resources sections. There are 97.4 FTE staff employed in mainstream HR, 17.5 FTE staff in payroll provision and 41.64 FTE staff in learning and development.

Prisoner Assessment Unit: Failings

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 7062/11-15 whether the report, when completed, will be (i) made available to the public; and (ii) brought before the Assembly in the interests of transparency.

(AQW 7951/11-15)

Mr Ford: The report of the Investigation into the Prisoner Assessment Unit (PAU) will be published in a redacted form. As stated in my answer to AQW 7062/11-15 no date has been fixed for that publication. The implementation of the report is an operational matter and I do not intend to bring it before the Assembly.

Courthouse Closures: Impact on Transport Costs

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the proposed court house closures (i) what measures will be put in place to assist defendants travelling on public transport who will have greater distances to travel and resulting increased costs, particularly in relation to youth offenders who will have at least one adult accompanying them; and (ii) whether defendants and those accompanying them will be provided with a travel allowance for public transport or taxis.

(AQW 7952/11-15)

Mr Ford: People attending court hearings are responsible for their own travel arrangements. There are no plans to provide a travel allowance as part of these proposals.

Prisoners: Forensic Psychologist Assessments

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many prisoners in each prison are waiting to be assessed by a forensic psychologist.

(AQW 7954/11-15)

Mr Ford: Chartered/Registered Forensic Psychologists are qualified to assess a prisoner's suitability to undertake Offending Behaviour Programmes. Assessments can also be carried out by Trainee Psychologists under the supervision of a qualified Forensic Psychologist.

The number of prisoners currently waiting to be assessed by prison psychology in relation to sex offences are listed below:

Maghaberry	8
Magilligan	15
Hydebank Wood	1

Prisoners: Death by Suicide

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Justice how many coroner's verdicts are outstanding in relation to prisoners' suicides in jail in each of the last five years.

(AQW 7977/11-15)

Mr Ford: There were nine prisoner deaths, which the prison service has recorded as suicides, in the last five years, which have yet to be determined by a Coroner's Inquest. There is also a coroner's verdict yet to be recorded in respect of a prisoner who died in police custody in 2009.

Colin Bell: Death in Custody

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Justice how many of the 40 recommendations in the Prisoner Ombudsman's report on the suicide of Colin Bell have been implemented.

(AQW 7978/11-15)

Mr Ford: The report by the Prisoner Ombudsman following the death in custody of Colin Bell made 44 recommendations of which 43 were accepted by NIPS. To date 40 have been recorded as completed, the remaining three have been partially completed. Work on those recommendations recorded as partially completed is being taken forward in conjunction with the recommendations contained in the CJINI report into the Treatment of Vulnerable Prisoners by the NI Prison Service.

Prisoners: Death by Suicide

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Justice how many prisoners have committed suicide whilst in police custody in each of the last five years.

(AQW 7979/11-15)

Mr Ford: In the five year period from January 2007- January 2012 there has been one prisoner death recorded by the Northern Ireland Prison Service as being due to suicide whilst in police custody.

Prisoners: Death by Suicide

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Justice how many coroner's verdicts are outstanding in relation to prisoners' suicides in police custody in each of the last five years.

(AQW 7980/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is one outstanding coroner's verdict in relation to a prisoners suicide in police custody in the five year period from January 2007- January 2012.

Prisoners: Death by Suicide

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Justice how many cases of death in custody are still being investigated by the Prisoner Ombudsman.

(AQW 7981/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Prisoner Ombudsman is currently investigating eight cases of death in custody.

Compensation: Major Incident Claims

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Justice (i) what steps the Compensation Agency intends to take to review its communications with the loss adjusters to ensure that residents are given the necessary information to be able to pursue a claim for personal damage or damage to property caused by bomb explosions; and (ii) the timescale for any such review.

(AQW 8008/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Compensation Agency has undertaken a review of their procedures for multiple damage incidents, and new procedures will be implemented from 1 March 2012.

The Agency's loss adjusters, when visiting scenes after major incidents, will distribute guidance booklets and initial claim forms to residents whose properties have been damaged as a result of bomb explosions. In addition, all local council offices will be offered a major incident pack, containing claim forms, guidance leaflets and contact numbers for the Compensation Agency, which can be distributed to residents in their area.

The Compensation Agency will also continue to work closely with the PSNI, local councils and Departmental Community Safety Branch with a view to offering assistance in the aftermath of any future major incidents.

Computer Hacking

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Justice whether computer hacking is classified as anti-social behaviour rather than cyber-crime, and if so, the reasons for this.

(AQW 8044/11-15)

Mr Ford: Computer hacking is a criminal offence contrary to section 1 of the Computer Misuse Act 1990 and would therefore not be classified as anti-social behaviour.

Prisoners: Drug Use

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, for each of the last three years to detail how many searches of prisoners, prison cells and property in each prison resulted in a recovery of drugs; and of these, how many of the drugs were (i) illegal substances; and (ii) prescription drugs which were not prescribed for the prisoner who was in possession of these.

(AQW 8058/11-15)

Mr Ford: The number of drugs finds as a result of searches of prisoners, prison cells and property in each prison for each of the last three years is as follows:

YEAR	2009	2010	2011
Maghaberry	74	37	44
Magilligan	42	27	28
Hydebank Wood	37	15	18
Total	153	79	90

It is not possible to tell from the records held whether these drugs are illegal drugs or prescription medication in possession of a prisoner for whom they were not prescribed.

Barry Johnston

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 7237/11-15, what indicators and legislation are used to determine when it is necessary to inform the public; and whether he intends to review the legislation.

(AQW 8059/11-15)

Mr Ford: Disclosure of information about individual offenders whose risk is managed under the PPANI arrangements is carried out under section 6 of the Guidance to Agencies on Public Protection Arrangements and operational practice as detailed in section 20 of the PPANI Manual of Practice. Both documents are available on the PPANI website.

Barry Johnston

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many of the recommendations, contained in the Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland's Serious Case Review on Barry Johnston, have been implemented fully or in part.

(AQW 8063/11-15)

Mr Ford: As detailed in the executive summary of the serious case review, published by the PPANI agencies on 9 January 2012, all of the recommendations have been accepted by the agencies. Action

has been taken and completed in respect of four of the recommendations. Action is ongoing in respect of implementing the remaining three recommendations.

Prisons: Offensive Weapons

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many searches of cells, property and prisoners recovered offensive weapons in each of the last three years, broken down by prison facility.

(AQW 8082/11-15)

Mr Ford: For the period 1 January 2009 to 31 December 2011 the number of weapons recovered as a result of cell, property, and prisoner searches is as follows:

	2009	2010	2011	Total
Maghaberry	9	11	13	33
Magilligan	5	7	10	22
Hydebank Wood	3	6	3	12
Total	17	24	26	67

Courthouse Closures: Costs Incurred by Defendants

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the proposed closure of courthouses, what consideration has been given to the impact of the additional distances that defendants, who fall just outside the qualifying remit for legal aid, will have to travel, the additional expenses that they will incur, and the loss of income as a result of the longer periods of time that they will be absent from work when attending hearings.

(AQW 8084/11-15)

Mr Ford: People attending court hearings are responsible for their own travel arrangements. There are no plans under these proposals to provide a travel allowance to defendants or to compensate them for their time spent at court.

Bench Warrants

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many Bench Warrants, including European Arrest Warrants, are outstanding for people wanted for attempted murder; and how many of these were issued (i) between one and five years ago; (ii) between five and ten years ago; (iii) between ten and fifteen years ago; (iv) between fifteen and twenty years ago; and (v) more than twenty years ago.

(AQW 8086/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are currently no Bench Warrants or European Arrest Warrants outstanding for a defendant charged with attempted murder.

As of 6 February 2012, there are five outstanding Arrest Warrants (Magistrates' Court and Youth Court) relating to five defendants charged with attempted murder. These are set out in the table below:

Warrant Issued	Number Outstanding
1 to 5 years	2
5 to 10 years	3
Total	5

Prisoners: Educational Programmes

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what educational programmes are available for prisoners. **(AQW 8087/11-15)**

Mr Ford: The table below sets out the current educational and vocational programmes available to prisoners within the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS).

Educational	Vocational Training
Essential Skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Literacy ■ Numeracy ■ Information and Communication Technology (ICT) 	Plumbing
GCSE English	Joinery
GCSE Maths	Painting and decorating
ICT	Bricklaying
English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)	Plastering
Distance learning courses such as Open University	Furniture craft
Preparation for Employment, incl. money management	Braille
Creative writing	Metal Fabrication
Drama	Industrial cleaning
Art	Grounds – waste management, general maintenance
Craft	Horticulture
Ceramics/pottery	Laundry
Leathercraft	BSC Health and Safety Level 1
Music	Basic Hairdressing/barbering
Fly Tying	
Cookery	
Stress management	
Media Studies	

Prisoners: Recreational Programmes

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what recreational programmes are available for prisoners **(AQW 8088/11-15)**

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Services (NIPS) recognises that promoting positive engagement in a range of educational, sport and recreational activities is a key factor in helping to maintain a healthy lifestyle and a contributing factor to the effective resettlement and rehabilitation of offenders.

The following list of recreational activities is indicative of those generally available to offenders in custody within Northern Ireland Prisons.

Educational and recreational activities provided by the Education departments within the prison include:

- Art
- Art and pottery
- Ceramic painting
- Cookery
- Craft
- Music
- Reading club
- Duke of Edinburgh's Award
- Fly Tying Course

Sport and Recreational activities available include:

- Gymnasium
- Multi-activity fitness classes
- Badminton
- Bodypump
- Football (indoor and outdoor)
- Spinning
- Volleyball
- Weightlifting
- Indoor Bowls

Prisoners: Paid Jobs

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what paid jobs are available for prisoners inside prison facilities.

(AQW 8089/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are a range of opportunities for prisoners to attend work activities. These include prison orderly duties, workshop activity and attendance at vocational training courses. Prisoners are not paid, as such, but a monetary allowance is payable depending on the regime level attained under the Progressive Regimes and Earned Privileges Scheme (PREPS). Details of the range of activities available are attached as a separate annex.

Annex

Work activities including orderly duties:

- Administration
- Education
- Gymnasium
- Healthcare
- Library
- Offender Management Unit
- Reception
- Residential – Ablutions and Landing, Laundry, Sundry
- SSU
- Stores
- Tuck shop
- Visits

Other work activities:

- Education
- Card making
- Cottage Industries
- Dog carer
- In-house painter
- Local work party
- Recycling
- Window cleaning
- Visits shop
- Wheelchair workshop

Vocational Training – the following opportunities may be available as part of a prisoner's educational / Sentence Plan

- Bricklaying
- Grounds maintenance
- Horticulture
- Industrial cleaning
- Joinery
- Painting and decorating
- Plumbing
- Braille Unit – translation of literature and sheet music
- Print Shop – providing in prison services and services for local businesses
- Catering

- Plastering
- Furniture craft
- Metal fabrication
- Laundry
- Basic hairdressing/barbering
- Health and Safety

Prisoners: Privileges

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice to list the privileges to which prisoners are entitled.
(AQW 8090/11-15)

Mr Ford: Prisoners are eligible to receive a range of privileges, however the level of entitlement is determined by their level of progress in and commitment to each regime level, including:

Regime Level	Basic	Standard	Enhanced
Prisoner Earnings Payments	Up To £4.00	Up To £11.00	Up To £20.00
Tuck-shop spend	£22.00 + wages	£33.00 + wages	£55.00 + wages
Phone credit spend	£20.00	£24.00	£30.00
Visits	1 – one hour visit (at managers discretion if family visit)	1 session weekly	1 session per week plus an extra enhanced session per month.
Gym Sessions	1 Session	Up to 3 Sessions	Up to 5 sessions (depending on waiting list)

Other incentives and privileges include: -

- Additional out of cell association
- Electrical equipment, including television, radio, personal CD / DVD, Playstation (TVs are rented from the prison.)
- **In cell hobby craft materials**
- **Allowed to keep budgies (life sentence prisoners only)**

Prisoners: Visiting Rights

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice to list the visiting rights to which prisoners are entitled.
(AQW 8091/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Prison and Young Offenders Centre Rules (Northern Ireland) 1995 provides for the visiting rights to which prisoners are entitled.

Rule 68(3) provides for the entitlement of a sentenced prisoner to a visit once in a period of four weeks and for the Department of Justice, as a privilege, to allow additional visits to any class of prisoner.

At present, sentenced prisoners are permitted a weekly visit.

Rule 101(3) provides for the entitlement of an untried prisoner to receive as many visits as he wishes within such limits and subject to such conditions as the Department of Justice may direct, either generally or in a particular case.

At present the majority of remand prisoners receive two visits per week.

Prisoners may also receive visits from a wide range of professionals, including pastoral and legal visits, and visits from public representatives, including MPs and MLAs. Additional visits can be approved at the discretion of the Governor.

Fuel: DOJ Spend

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Justice how much his Department, and its agencies, have spent on fuel in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8096/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice (DOJ) came into existence on 12th April 2010 therefore the amount spent on fuel can only be provided for 2010/11.

The total spent on fuel in 2010/11 for the Department and its agencies was £203,994. This covers vehicle fuel only and excludes any energy costs relating to buildings.

Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises: DOJ Spend

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how much his Department has spent on conferences, away-days and team building exercises in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8100/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice was established on 12th April 2010 therefore information on spend has been provided for the periods 12th April 2010 to 31st March 2011 and from 1st April 2011 to date.

2010/2011	Conferences	£18707
Business development days	£0	
Team building	£0	
2011/2012	Conferences	£21897
Business development days	£2160	
Team building	£0	

Officials in the Department attend business related conferences when attendance would contribute to the delivery of DOJ business. Costs relating to business development days are kept to a minimum and Government facilities are used wherever possible. The Department does not engage in team building activities where costs would be incurred. Instead, officials are enabled to undertake volunteering activities under our Corporate Social Responsibility strategy.

Private Investigators: DOJ Usage

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice whether the use of private investigators to investigate employees of his Department and its arm's-length bodies is common practice; and if so, which arm's-length bodies operate this practice.

(AQW 8124/11-15)

Mr Ford: It is not common practice to use private investigators in the DOJ. However, the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) will consider using private investigators in exceptional circumstances.

Private Investigators: Prison Service Usage

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 7354/11-15, which organisations have provided private investigator services; and how they were selected.

(AQW 8125/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Prison Service has used four companies, all of whom were selected on the basis of their holding appropriate qualifications and operating in the required geographical area. It would not be appropriate to name the companies involved.

Private Investigators: Prison Service Usage

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 7354/11-15, to detail the number and grade of Prison Service employees who have been investigated by private investigators.

(AQW 8126/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service has used private investigators to investigate seven employees. To provide a breakdown by grade is likely to lead to the identification of individuals and thereby breach the first principle of data protection.

TV Licence: Convictions

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice how many people, who were convicted for not owning a valid tv licence in the last five years, have subsequently been convicted of the same offence.

(AQW 8128/11-15)

Mr Ford: In the five year period 1 January 2007 to 31 December 2011 there was a total of 17,088 people convicted of not having a valid TV licence. Of these, 1,932 people had two or more convictions for the same offence.

Public Order Offences: 12 July 2011

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, of the 30 men who are due to stand trial for public order offences committed over the Twelfth of July 2011 period in Belfast, how many are from Belfast.

(AQW 8173/11-15)

Mr Ford: Of the 30 defendants with outstanding Preliminary Inquiry proceedings in the Magistrates' Court relating to offences arising from disturbances over the Twelfth of July 2011 period in Belfast, 27 had a Belfast address when charged.

Summons Cases: Performance

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 7375/11-15, when he first became aware of the deterioration of the performance of summons cases; and whether this date coincides with the ruling that postal summonses can only be accepted at courts if an acknowledgement of service was lodged.

(AQW 8174/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department monitors performance against the standards set for the criminal justice system using data from completed cases provided by the Public Prosecution Service and the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service. Performance reports received in June 2011 identified that summons performance for 2010/11 had deteriorated from levels achieved in 2009/10.

Where a defendant fails to appear in answer to a postal summons, the Magistrates' Courts Rules (Northern Ireland) 1984 provide that service may not be considered valid unless the defendant has acknowledged service. This requirement has been in operation since 1993.

Historic Crimes: Amnesty

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the suggestion by the Police Ombudsman of an amnesty for historic crimes.

(AQW 8206/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is an Article 2 duty on the Executive to ensure there are proper investigations in respect of cases where there has been a loss of life. The Police Ombudsman, the Historical Enquiries Team

and the Coroners Court will continue to investigate these cases unless and until an alternative is put in place. However, I recognise the difficulties that this creates for the Ombudsman's Office.

The absence of a political consensus about dealing with the past makes it hard to envisage the early creation of an alternative mechanism to address these cases. However, I would welcome a public debate on these issues and urge the Secretary of State, First Minister and deputy First Minister to consider how that debate can most effectively be taken forward.

Convictions: Unspent

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice how many people have convictions which are unspent under the terms of the Rehabilitation of Offenders (Northern Ireland) Order 1978.

(AQW 8256/11-15)

Mr Ford: Around 300,000 people in Northern Ireland have a conviction and a manual exercise would be required to check each record to determine how many of those people have convictions which are unspent under the terms of the Rehabilitation of Offenders (Northern Ireland) Order 1978. To carry out such an exercise would incur considerable expense and this information could only be provided at disproportionate cost to the public purse.

Enniskillen Courthouse: Double Yellow Lines

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 6390/11-15 and AQW 7464/11-15, given that everyone who attended the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service meeting expressed opposition to the yellow lines, and that the traders, who were visited by officials, were informed by letter of the perceived need to introduce parking restrictions, to clarify his use of the phrase "consultation took place with local traders".

(AQW 8268/11-15)

Mr Ford: The phrase "consultation took place with local traders" refers to a NICTS official visiting business premises in East Bridge Street, Enniskillen and explaining the proposal to introduce parking restrictions and the proposed location of the double yellow lines.

Letters also issued to business premises explaining the proposal to introduce the parking restrictions with NICTS contact details. No objections were made at that time.

Crime Prevention Methods and Reporting Incidents of Crime

Mrs Dobson asked Minister of Justice to outline the initiatives being undertaken by his Department to raise awareness amongst the public of crime prevention methods and reporting incidents of crime, broken down by Policing District.

(AQW 8325/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am currently developing a new Community Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland. The aim of the new Strategy is to build safer, shared and confident communities with lower levels of crime and where people feel able to report any incidents.

Currently at a regional level the Department of Justice supports the work of the independent charity Crimestoppers which is an anonymous route by which members of the public may pass on information about crime. Funding is provided to assist the charity in raising awareness, and encouraging the reporting, of crime.

In addition the Department of Justice, in partnership with others, contributes to the funding and development of Neighbourhood Watch schemes across all district Council areas of Northern Ireland. This partnership between local communities, Police, Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) and District Policing Partnerships (DPPs) seeks to help people protect themselves and their property, and to reduce the fear of crime. There are currently 679 schemes in place involving over 41,000 households and the schemes continue to grow.

At a local level the Department of Justice supports the Community Safety Partnerships across Northern Ireland to deliver a range of initiatives that promote awareness among the general population of crime prevention methods and to encourage the reporting of crime. Initiatives are developed and delivered to meet locally identified needs. I have attached examples of such initiatives at Annex A broken down by Policing District.

ANNEX A

Policing District	Events to raise Awareness of Crime Prevention Methods and Reporting Incidents
A & B	<p>Raising awareness through information campaigns and events such as ‘Safety of Seniors’, Bee Safe Roadshow, District Policing Partnership (DPP) Christmas Safety Event, DPP General Fora for discussion</p> <p>Wardens Services - wardens offer advice to householders whose properties may appear vulnerable and also provide information on how to report crimes and contact other service providers.</p> <p>Good Morning & Befriending schemes - work daily with elderly and vulnerable people across the city and support individuals to remain safe and well in their homes. PSNI provide advice on crime prevention.</p> <p>3rd Party reporting - as part of its commitment to tackling Hate Crime Belfast Community Safety Partnership (CSP) has supported the development of a 3rd party reporting system which works with a number of communities where they may be higher levels of victimisation and a reluctance to report crime</p>
C	<p>Raising awareness through joint CSP, PSNI and DPP work to promote crime prevention and crime reporting at events such as:</p> <p>‘Safety of Seniors’ events</p> <p>Talks to local schools and groups</p> <p>The publication of information in local press which is distributed to every home in the Borough.</p> <p>Circulation of Crime Prevention messages via e mail and text alert to neighbourhood watch co-ordinators and some members of Community Police Liaison Committee’s (CPLCs) and Partners And Community Together (PACTs).</p> <p>Bee – Safe - proactive multi-agency community safety initiative specifically aimed at approx 400 primary 7 pupils within the Castlereagh Borough. Participation at the event teaches pupils how to react in dangerous situations, make a contribution to crime prevention, avoid becoming the victim of crime, understand the role of emergency services, and also develop good relationships with various authorities.</p> <p>Midnight Street Soccer –includes an educational aspect on a range of community safety issues.</p> <p>Knife Crime -in an effort to highlight the dangers and consequences of knife crime/ culture, a drama company was employed who delivered strong messages through the medium of drama, ‘Who do you say I am?’</p> <p>Trailer Marking - a free trailer marking & registration scheme organised in the Carryduff area in Nov’11.</p>

Policing District	Events to raise Awareness of Crime Prevention Methods and Reporting Incidents
C	<p>Tackling Domestic Burglary and Door step crime and providing reassurance to victims - A project known as 'Secure-Ring' is offering the only door restrictor to be awarded the Secure By Design accreditation. The aim is to reduce the fear of crime of vulnerable people within local communities and increase the capacity of these people to use basic home security measures and improve their quality of life. CSP has funded Secure by Design door locks which are distributed by the CPO to the elderly and vulnerable.</p>
D	<p>Raising awareness - Bogus Callers and Domestic Burglary 'Willie Nickit' Public Information Campaign - How to Deter / Report Domestic Burglars</p> <p>'Beautiful Life' Awareness / Training DVD – Alerts Potential Victims and Challenges Perpetrators Behaviour</p> <p>Mobile and Fixed LCD Screen Messages - Targets Public with Advice in Selected City and Rural Areas</p> <p>PSNI D. District Community Safety Newsletter - Incorporates Crime Prevention and Personal Safety Advice for Recipients</p> <p>'You Can Change Their World' (Annual) Schools Awareness Campaign - Engages Secondary Level Schools on Personal Safety</p> <p>Schools Personal Safety & Crime Prevention Awareness Education – Key Stages 3 and 4</p> <p>Seasonal Calendars - Targets Vulnerable People in the Community with Advice on Crime Prevention</p> <p>Crime Information Stands – Engages Customers / Clients in Shopping Malls and Public Places on Crime Prevention and Personal Safety</p> <p>Community Education – Interactive Presentations to Youth and Community Organisations</p> <p>Crime Prevention literature produced e.g. around reporting drug dealing includes all numbers for reporting crime i.e. PSNI 0845..... and the Crime Stoppers Number and billboard advertisements publicise these numbers.</p> <p>Crime prevention leaflet distributed to all rural properties within the borough which provides advice and promotes reporting of rural crime.</p> <p>'Lisburn Secured' Target Hardening Scheme - Equips Homes/Advises Vulnerable People on Crime Prevention and Personal Safety</p>
D	<p>Domestic Abuse - Advisory Input to Domestic Abuse and Adults at Risk Forums to deliver Community Safety Advice, Information and Interventions and provide Community Safety advice and information to Referred Clients</p> <p>Alcohol and Drug Campaigns – Provides Input to 'You Your Child and Alcohol' Campaign and Various Other Campaigns</p> <p>Training of Community Volunteers – Equips Locally Recruited People to Respond to Neighbourhood Crime Prevention and Personal Safety Issues</p> <p>Engagement with Hard to Reach Groups – Supports Interventions with Young People, Adults and Marginalised groups</p> <p>Antrim 4 Tier Scheme – provides a range of home/personal security equipment; advice is given on crime prevention</p>

Policing District	Events to raise Awareness of Crime Prevention Methods and Reporting Incidents
E	<p>Raising awareness - Attendance at community and residents groups, open evenings, provision of newspaper with advice, contacts cards, public meetings, press releases issued every few weeks etc. to provide advice and guidance (over 20 crime prevention presentations are undertaken each year)</p> <p>Seasonal campaigns including Summer, Halloween and Christmas providing information on crime trends during this time</p> <p>Supporting and promoting Radiolink and CCTV in the Borough</p> <p>'Craigavon Secured' – Provision of free home security upgrades to a target referral group</p> <p>Over 1200 burglary packs providing home security equipment to vulnerable people and those who have been victims</p> <p>Over 4,000 personal alarms issued over last 4 years to communities</p> <p>Crimetext - widely used by scheme members and other members of the public.</p> <p>Community Crime Alert – equipment and advice given to a range of target groups. Central to this initiative is the outlining of various methods used to advice community on how to contact emergency services.</p> <p>Community Safety Wardens - provide information and advice, encourage reporting of crime.</p> <p>Trailer marking scheme</p> <p>Community fora established – community safety and policing issues discussed, member encouraged to report crime, members updated on initiatives</p> <p>Domestic Violence Drop-in- a dedicated drop-in service for victims, together with outreach work is undertaken in relation to encouraging victims to report instances of domestic violence</p> <p>Good Morning Service - As well as providing a local call service, advice is routinely passed on to service users eg presence of bogus callers and various telephone scam schemes. Service users are encouraged to report all incidents to local police</p>
F	<p>Raising awareness – initiatives to raise awareness amongst the public of reporting incidents of crime have included:</p> <p>Circulation of publications in various languages to make members of the migrant community and ethnic minorities aware of the need to report crime and the process for doing so;</p> <p>Utilising the Dungannon DPP 'Reporting crime' initiatives and circulation of their Reporting Crime publication (approximately 2,500 leaflets distributed in Fermanagh)</p> <p>Promotion of initiatives such as the Quick Check Scheme.</p> <p>Helping Hands Project – involves Women's Aid who work with young people giving advice on who they can and should speak to if they feel unsafe.</p> <p>Warden project – to encourage reporting of anti-social behaviour.</p> <p>Promotion of the Policing with the Community programme and Neighbourhood Policing at CSP and DPP engagement events.</p>

Policing District	Events to raise Awareness of Crime Prevention Methods and Reporting Incidents
F	<p>Various events and roadshows held throughout the year which highlight crime prevention awareness and initiatives and includes the distribution of equipment</p> <p>Specific crime prevention programmes by the Community Safety Partnership and District Policing partnership have included:</p> <p>Domestic Burglary campaign - booklet issued with advice on how to reduce the opportunities for the burglar to target the home (circulated to every home in Fermanagh) and property marking pen.</p> <p>Tourist Hotspot programme - through a publicity campaign and the erection of signage alerting the public to remove valuables from their vehicles, allow sight of empty boots, front pockets, etc. and park in open areas within view of the public;</p> <p>Trailer marking - piloted in Fermanagh, and now widespread across NI, this programme has been highly successful in reducing the theft of trailers and other farm machinery.</p> <p>Vacant property DNA Marking kits - this programme is part of a Market Reduction Approach specifically addressing the theft of metal (hot-water tanks, copper piping) from vacant properties.</p> <p>Padlock alarms - this is an initiative specifically for victims of crime intended to reduce the level of repeat victimisation.</p> <p>Social alarms pendants for older and vulnerable people.</p> <p>Interventions training - directed at licensed premises staff and managers, this aims to raise awareness of issues around the abuse of alcohol and drugs</p> <p>Business Watch/Ringmaster – businesses are encouraged to sign up to this scheme which distributes timely crime related messages to them to tackle both raising awareness and reporting of crime. This programme has been extended to the Dungannon and South Tyrone and Cookstown Council areas. Omagh will join the scheme in April 2012.</p>
G	<p>Raising awareness – CSP, DPP and PSNI deliver a number of initiatives to raise public awareness about crime:</p> <p>School Screens – The CSP has placed 42” plasma screens in all eight post primary schools in the district. They broadcast a mix of messages on crime prevention, community safety and information on youth diversionary activities to the pupils during the year.</p> <p>SaferMagherafelt.com – The CSP created a website with crime prevention information for the residents of Magherafelt.</p> <p>Agewell –CSP holds information and training sessions for older people that includes crime prevention.</p> <p>Community Safety Wardens – three warden schemes working in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas, the Educational Precinct and the Derry City Council rural region. The wardens provide home visits giving advice, security items such as door bars and taking details of incidents. The schemes deliver a high visible warden presence which acts both as a deterrent to criminal activity and reduces fear of crime in the community.</p>

Policing District	Events to raise Awareness of Crime Prevention Methods and Reporting Incidents
G	<p>School Watch/Church Watch –provides local community organisations with the tools to communicate and raise awareness about local crimes being committed and who to contact.</p> <p>Trailer Marking – The CSP has supported the Derry DPP and PSNI in rolling out a number of trailer marking events across the rural community to encourage farmers to protect their equipment against theft.</p>
H	<p>Raising awareness - Ballymoney CSP ran a 'Racism ruins lives' awareness raising campaign and we also facilitated some work with older people at our Alive & Well convention around crime prevention techniques.</p> <p>Larne CSP organises Locality Groups which are publically advertised and allows residents and Community Groups to attend and report incidents of crime and allows the PSNI to provide crime prevention advice.</p> <p>DPP and CSP work in partnership to promote the reporting of crime incidents by providing promotional booklets with crime prevention advice. CSP attend numerous events and provide relevant information.</p> <p>CSP also distribute a wide variety of promotional items which inform the public how to report crime and the telephone number in which to do so.</p> <p>The DPP & CSP also issue several press releases throughout the year to inform the public how to report crime and to give crime advice.</p> <p>The Bann Maine West Community Cluster and CSP aim to hold an awareness raising session in late February which seeks to raise awareness of crime prevention. Around 150 people, elderly and vulnerable, are expected to attend.</p> <p>Communities Together Forum which is a partnership initiative involving PSNI, DPP and CSP provides a quarterly forum for separate urban and rural audiences to raise issues for police priority. The constant message is the importance of reporting crime.</p> <p>We trained 4 community stakeholders in the Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) ambassador training which looks at keeping children and young people safe on line and how to report incidents online.</p>

Summonses: Costs

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 7375/11-15, to provide an estimate of the annual savings that might be made from (i) sending Public Prosecution Service summonses by recorded delivery, as opposed to personal service, where applicable, following no acknowledgement of the first summons sent by standard post; and (ii) cases proceeding through the court system in a timely manner without unnecessary delays such as strike-outs.

(AQW 8357/11-15)

Mr Ford: The cost associated with the serving of summonses by the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) is a matter for the PPS. You may therefore wish to direct this element of your question directly to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

There are a number of factors which contribute to the cost of criminal cases and, therefore, it is not possible to estimate savings to the system which might be made from cases proceeding through the court system in a timely manner without unnecessary delay such as strike-outs.

Sobriety Tags

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what liaison his Department intends to have with the Greater London Authority regarding its pilot scheme of sobriety tags for offenders.

(AQW 8375/11-15)

Mr Ford: On 11 February the Greater London Authority announced that they propose to undertake a pilot initiative, utilising a sobriety bracelet, for criminals convicted of serious alcohol related offences. Alcohol intake will be monitored using the bracelet and anyone found to be drinking will be rearrested, with the Court having the option of sending the offender to prison.

It has been suggested that the pilot scheme will commence in Summer 2012 but this is dependant upon the necessary legislative changes being in place to provide the Courts with the authority to offer this type of disposal. I understand that legislative proposals are under consideration in Westminster. The DoJ will monitor the position and the subsequent pilot scheme.

Prison Service: Principal Officer Grade

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice whether there are any plans to abolish the rank of Principal Officer in the Prison Service.

(AQW 8413/11-15)

Mr Ford: As part of the overall restructuring of the Northern Ireland Prison Service it is proposed to remove several layers of management. One such layer is the Principal Officer grade.

Prisoner Assessment Unit: Staff

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 6083/11-15 (i) whether this matter was reported to the Chief Inspector of Prisons; (ii) if not, why it was not reported; and (iii) if it was reported, what was the outcome.

(AQW 8494/11-15)

Mr Ford: This matter was not reported to the Chief Inspector of Prisons nor to the Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice. The inspection of prisons is a matter for Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland, which draws on the resources of HM Chief Inspector of Prisons.

The internal investigation by the Northern Ireland Prison Service into the Prisoner Assessment Unit in Belfast was within the remit of NIPS to complete, particularly where the investigation included disciplinary concerns.

Contraband: Roe House, HMP Maghaberry

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 7592/11-15, to detail each incident when contraband was found in Roe House, including the dates and a description of the contraband.

(AQW 8496/11-15)

Mr Ford: Due to the security implications involved it would be inappropriate to set out the details of the contraband found in Roe House.

Marian Price: Move to Hydebank Wood

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Justice whether he had any discussions with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, or the Secretary of State, in advance of the movement of Marian Price from Maghaberry Prison.

(AQW 8498/11-15)

Mr Ford: The decision to transfer Mrs McGlinchey to Hydebank Wood was an operational decision, based on clinical advice from the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, which has responsibility for the healthcare of all prisoners across Northern Ireland. I had no discussions with the Minister of

HSSPS, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister or the Secretary of State in relation to that operational decision.

Marian Price: Move to Hydebank Wood

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice, when the recent decision to move Marion Price/McGlinchey to Hydebank Wood was taken on medical advice, whose Ministerial authority was given to approve the move.

(AQW 8521/11-15)

Mr Ford: The decision to transfer Mrs McGlinchey to Hydebank Wood was an operational decision, based on clinical advice from the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, which has responsibility for the healthcare of all prisoners across Northern Ireland. The Prison Service and the Trust have, on a number of occasions, discussed and reviewed Mrs McGlinchey's needs whilst in custody. The decision to relocate her to Hydebank Wood was part of that review process.

Criminal Record Regime: Review

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the review of the Criminal Record Regime in Northern Ireland which was carried out by Sunita Mason; and what action he intends to take as a result of the findings.

(AQW 8553/11-15)

Mr Ford: The review looked at two areas. Part One covered the processes for the disclosure of criminal records and other information for pre-employment purposes and that report was published in August 2011. Part Two was a wider consideration of criminal records management. That report will be published in early March.

I welcome the approach taken by Mrs Mason in the review. She has made a number of important recommendations. These take account of the revised Vetting and Barring Scheme arrangements, which will apply in England and Wales and which the Assembly agreed should extend to Northern Ireland, but her review also recognises the particular issues concerning the systems and legislation in place here.

Consultation on the Part One report began on 14 December 2011 and will conclude on 6 March 2012. The consultation document highlights that I have already accepted the recommendations which Mrs Mason made in relation to portability and on-line checking and the switch from two to one certificate. I will publish the outcome of the consultation on Part One once I have had an opportunity to consider the views expressed.

Consideration is currently being given to the recommendations in the Part Two report and a consultation process will follow.

Case Number 12/20314

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether case number 12/20314, who appeared at Dungannon Magistrates' Court on 17 February 2012, committed the alleged offences whilst on day release from a custodial sentence.

(AQW 8564/11-15)

Mr Ford: As the Court has imposed reporting restrictions in the above matter it would be inappropriate for me to provide any information whilst the restrictions remain in force.

Department for Regional Development

Civil Service: Posts

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development how many Civil Service posts existed in his Department at (i) Administrative Assistant; (ii) Administrative Officer; (iii) Executive Officer 2; (iv) Executive Officer 1; (v) Staff Officer; (vi) Deputy Principal; (vii) Grade 7; and (viii) Grade 6 levels, at the beginning of (a) 2007; and (b) 2012, broken down by local Council area.

(AQW 7694/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): The information in respect of my Department is as follows:

DRD POSTS AT 1 JANUARY 2007 BY DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA

District Council	Analogous Grade Level						Total
	AA	AO	E01/ E02	SO	DP	Grade 6/7	
Antrim	5	3	10	3	2	0	23
Ards	4	2	3	1	1	0	11
Armagh	11	7	10	3	1	0	32
Ballymena	42	54	91	55	23	5	270
Ballymoney	7	1	4	1	1	0	14
Banbridge	4	1	5	1	1	0	12
Belfast	115	209	406	222	202	86	1240
Carrickfergus	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Castlereagh	35	25	70	41	19	8	198
Coleraine	29	15	51	23	13	5	136
Cookstown	7	1	4	1	1	0	14
Craigavon	33	19	75	42	23	5	197
Derry	14	31	56	20	12	1	134
Down	30	24	64	26	14	3	161
Dungannon	9	3	8	2	1	0	23
Fermanagh	14	12	28	9	4	1	68
Larne	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Limavady	5	1	3	1	1	0	11
Lisburn	13	5	10	3	2	0	33
Magherafelt	5	2	6	1	1	0	15
Moyle	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Newry & Mourne	13	11	16	4	2	0	46
Newtownabbey	1	1	1	0	0	0	3

District Council	Analogous Grade Level						Total
	AA	AO	E01/ E02	S0	DP	Grade 6/7	
North Down	9	1	5	2	1	0	18
Omagh	20	21	54	31	14	5	145
Strabane	9	2	6	1	1	0	19
Unidentified	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
Total	434	451	987	494	340	119	2825

* In addition to these figures, there were a further 448 vacancies across all grades in DRD. This figure cannot be split by individual grade or by District Council area.

DRD POSTS AT 1 JANUARY 2012 BY DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA

District Council	Analogous Grade Level								Total
	AA	AO	E02	E01	S0	DP	Grade 7	Grade 6	
Antrim	6	3	0	9	3	2	0	0	23
Ards	5	3	0	5	1	1	0	0	15
Armagh	8	7	0	13	3	2	0	0	33
Ballymena	22	23	7	42	30	13	5	2	144
Ballymoney	5	1	0	6	1	1	0	0	14
Banbridge	5	1	0	6	1	0	0	0	13
Belfast	60	61	29	66	71	46	26	2	361
Castlereagh	17	26	5	71	48	19	6	2	194
Coleraine	21	22	7	40	21	13	6	1	131
Cookstown	10	3	0	12	2	1	0	0	28
Craigavon	27	25	6	45	28	10	4	1	146
Derry	12	5	4	15	5	4	0	0	45
Down	23	29	8	44	23	14	3	1	145
Dungannon	10	5	0	8	3	1	0	0	27
Fermanagh	13	15	1	16	5	2	0	0	52
Limavady	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Lisburn	15	2	0	8	2	1	0	0	28
Newry & Mourne	12	2	0	8	2	1	0	0	25
Newtownabbey	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3
North Down	7	2	0	4	1	1	0	0	15
Omagh	20	36	10	49	34	15	5	1	170

District Council	Analogous Grade Level								
	AA	AO	E02	E01	SO	DP	Grade 7	Grade 6	Total
Strabane	7	2	0	6	1	1	0	0	17
Total	307	273	77	475	285	148	55	10	1630

Street Lighting Schemes: Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new street lighting schemes are planned for the Silverstream area of Bangor, over the next three years.

(AQW 7732/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would remind the Member that information on completed and proposed schemes for the current financial year can be found in Roads Service's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from my Department's internet site at the following web address:

http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information/cinformationtype-results.htm?signpost=Customer+information&informationType=Roads+Service+reports+to+councils

With regard to proposed schemes for the next financial year, Roads Service is currently finalising details of its proposed works programmes for 2012/13. The Spring Council Reports, which are to be presented to local Councils during April and May of this year, will contain details of the agreed work programmes. These reports will also be accessible from the above website after they have been presented to local Councils.

Road and Footpath Schemes: Groomsport

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new (i) road; and (ii) footpath schemes are planned for the Groomsport village area over the next three years.

(AQW 7733/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to my answer to his Assembly Question, AQW 7732/11-15.

Recruitment Agencies: DRD Spend

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the amount paid to recruitment agencies for (i) full-time; and (ii) part-time posts in his Department, and its arm's-length bodies, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 7757/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The relevant amounts paid to recruitment agencies by my Department and its arm's-length bodies are set out below. Expenditure records do not differentiate between amounts incurred in respect of full-time and part-time posts.

	2008/09 £	2009/10 £	2010/11 £
Department for Regional Development	1,120,551	1,371,979	306,280
Northern Ireland Water	3,025,900	2,077,400	868,800
NI Transport Holding Company/Translink	324,320	266,311	335,303

Train Halt: George Best Belfast City Airport/Ikea

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development whether Translink has any plans to create a new train halt at George Best Belfast City Airport and Ikea.

(AQW 7769/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink do not have provision within its current capital Plan to create a new train halt at George Best Belfast City Airport and Ikea. There are no current plans for such halts to be developed within the existing budgets agreed at Executive level. Translink update capital plans on a regular basis and this is discussed with my Department.

Salt: Roads Service Stock

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development whether Roads Service is contractually required to purchase a minimum volume of rock salt per annum, for the salting of the roads network during periods of adverse weather.

(AQW 7784/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, in general, it is not contractually required to purchase a minimum volume of rock salt per annum.

However, as part of Roads Service's contingency planning, the supplier is required to hold an additional 10,000 tonnes of stock over and above the agreed delivery requirement. Roads Service undertakes to purchase this stock at the end of each season, if it has not already been called upon.

Salt: Roads Service Stock

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the volume of salt kept in storage by Roads Service in each of the last five years.

(AQW 7785/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it started this season holding around 110,000 tonnes of salt compared to around 65,000 tonnes held in each of the previous years. The storage capacity was increased this year as a result of changes to Roads Service's Contingency planning, following the last two very severe winters.

In order to ensure that Roads Service maintains adequate levels of salt throughout the Winter Season, minimum 'reorder level' criteria of 90% of full capacity is applied from 1 October until 1 January each year. Roads Service currently holds approximately 92,000 tonnes of salt in stock, which includes any additional stocks sourced during the current winter season.

Level Crossings: Unmanned Gates

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the number of unmanned level crossing gates; (ii) the number of reported safety issues at each of these level crossings in each of the last five years; and (iii) the number of level crossings that rely on gates only as a safety precaution.

(AQW 7817/11-15)

Mr Kennedy:

Category	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total	Comments
XL24 Skeganeagh	48	138	99	78	61	424	
XL108 Patsy Martin's	47	149	64	45	41	346	
XL109 Patsy Martin's	20	124	41	44	3	232	
XL189 Allinson's	5	86	63	78	28	260	

Category	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total	Comments
XD263 Robinson's	62	10	51	70	53	246	
XL198 Dodd's	6	89	76	40	22	233	
XL91 Gault's	23	87	36	31	6	183	Closed April 2011
XL196 McConaghy's	16	112	42	4	1	175	
XL106 Tweed's	12	48	31	23	59	173	
XL202 Nutt's / Craig	11	28	37	30	32	138	
XD261 Teacher's/Broo	28	39	31	18	4	120	
XL197 Brolley's	5	35	32	19	5	96	
XL190 Allinson's No	1	34	38	13	4	90	
XL14 Muckamore View	2	32	23	14	14	85	
XL11 Unnamed	9	20	12	11	10	62	
XL205 Barr's	1	9	21	7	0	38	
XD260 Tate's No 1	8	9	5	7	8	37	
XL156 Grangemore	3	5	9	4	14	35	
XL213 Donnybrewer	17	11	1	2	0	31	Closed Oct 2008*
XL16 Sewage Works (I	10	7	2	6	3	28	
XR330 DOE	14	12	1	0	1	28	
XL195 Molly Orr's	0	16	4	2	2	24	
XL204 Ballykelly Air	0	0	8	3	9	20	
XD290 Henry's	4	3	3	7	1	18	
XL7 Unnamed	2	2	5	6	3	18	
XL135 Hamill's	2	5	0	5	5	17	
XD283 Acton	3	2	3	5	3	16	
XL122 Sewage Works	7	1	1	4	3	16	
XL44 McWhirter's	7	9	0	0	0	16	Closed 2008
XL123 Sharpe's	3	5	2	2	3	15	
XL64 Crawford's	0	1	4	4	6	15	
XD280 Moneypenny's	1	1	1	4	7	14	
XL170 Woodtown	1	3	0	4	5	13	
XL86 Dowd's No.2	0	2	3	1	7	13	
XL96 McCracken's	1	0	6	3	3	13	
XL222 Foyle Bridge N	0	6	2	0	4	12	
XP245 Nobody's Inn	2	0	6	2	2	12	

Category	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total	Comments
XL126 Stephenson's N	0	3	2	1	5	11	
XL192 Allinson's No	0	7	2	2	0	11	
XL60 Roger's	0	3	1	1	6	11	
XL85 Dowd's No.1	0	3	1	4	3	11	
XR305 Barr's No 2	4	4	1	2	0	11	
XD259 McCullough's N	2	2	2	2	1	9	
XL155 Craig's	1	3	3	1	1	9	
XL185 McLoughan's	1	2	3	2	1	9	
XL199 Kilfillin No 1	2	1	5	1	0	9	Closed Feb 2011
XA340 Frazer's	3	3	0	1	1	8	
XD278 Flavelle's	0	2	0	5	1	8	
XL181 Canning's	0	1	3	4	0	8	
XL76 Love's	3	2	0	1	2	8	
XL77 Adam's No 1	2	2	1	3	0	8	
XL209 Faughnvaile	0	6	1	0	0	7	
XL35 Steele's	0	1	0	4	2	7	
XL25 Warwick's	1	3	2	0	0	6	
XR301 Wilson's	5	1	0	0	0	6	
XR304 Barr's No 1	1	2	0	2	1	6	
XD277 Dan's Rampart	0	0	1	4	0	5	
XL74 Wray's/Pumphous	0	4	0	1	0	5	
XL112 Greta Moore's	0	0	1	3	0	4	Closed Jan 2011
XL125 Stephenson's N	0	0	0	0	4	4	
XL201 Kilfillin No 2	0	1	1	2	0	4	Closed Feb 2011
XL29 Reed's	0	0	2	1	1	4	
XP227 University No	0	0	3	1	0	4	
XR323 Bashford's No	1	2	1	0	0	4	Closed March 2011
XA346 Ross's	1	2	0	0	0	3	
XD266 McAreavy's	0	0	1	2	0	3	
XL105 Anthony Martin	0	2	0	1	0	3	
XL130 Henry's	2	1	0	0	0	3	
XL166 Tyler's	1	2	0	0	0	3	

Category	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total	Comments
XL168 Herd's	0	0	1	2	0	3	
XL21 Sheridan House	0	2	0	1	0	3	
XL36 Tom Steele's	0	3	0	0	0	3	Closed Dec 2010
XL40 Cemetary	0	3	0	0	0	3	Closed Feb 2011
XL62 Bertie Paul's	0	2	0	1	0	3	Closed Aug 2010
XL71 Tin Hut, Glarry	0	1	0	0	2	3	
XL92 Molloy's	1	1	0	1	0	3	
XB253 Kinnegar - Eme	0	0	0	1	1	2	
XD258 McCullough's N	2	0	0	0	0	2	
XD273 McCann's	0	0	0	1	1	2	
XD282 Graham's	1	0	0	0	1	2	
XL115 George Peden's	0	1	1	0	0	2	Closed Aug 2010
XL129 Unnamed	0	1	0	0	1	2	
XL136 Kelly's	0	0	0	1	1	2	
XL169 Canning's	0	0	2	0	0	2	
XL175 McDevitt's	0	0	0	1	1	2	
XL177 Auld's	0	0	1	1	0	2	Closed Feb 2011
XL178 McDevitt's	0	0	0	1	1	2	
XL184 Hanna's	0	2	0	0	0	2	Closed March 2011
XL188 Quigley's	0	0	0	1	1	2	Closed March 2011
XL28 Hill's	0	0	0	2	0	2	
XL67 Frazer's	1	0	1	0	0	2	
XL69 Crawford's	0	2	0	0	0	2	
XL78 Adam's No 2	1	1	0	0	0	2	
XL97 Stewart's & Moo	1	0	0	0	1	2	
XA333 Fleming's (Dis	0	1	0	0	0	1	
XA336 Boomer's	0	1	0	0	0	1	
XA337 Boomer's	0	1	0	0	0	1	
XA345 Fletcher's	0	0	0	0	1	1	

Category	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total	Comments
XD262 Tate's No 2	0	0	1	0	0	1	Closed Jan 2007**
XL131 Kearney's No 1	0	1	0	0	0	1	
XL163 Freehall	0	1	0	0	0	1	
XL182 Allen's	0	0	0	0	1	1	Closed March 2011
XL220 Lisahully 90.2	0	0	1	0	0	1	
XL42 Ballymena Acade	0	0	0	1	0	1	
XL45 Martin's	0	0	0	0	1	1	
XL66 Frazer's / Beat	1	0	0	0	0	1	
XL68 Mooney's	0	0	1	0	0	1	
XL79 Adam's No 3	0	1	0	0	0	1	Closed Feb 2011
XL84 Gillespie's	0	1	0	0	0	1	Closed March 2010
XL88 Robinson's	0	0	0	1	0	1	Closed March 2011
XR297 Martin's No 2	0	1	0	0	0	1	
XD279 Neill's	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XD281 Carroll's	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XD267 McLoran's	0	0	0	0	0	0	Closed October 2009
XD268 McLorans	0	0	0	0	0	0	Closed October 2009
XL8 Unnamed	0	0	0	0	0	0	Closed April 2011
XL5 Land Crossing	0	0	0	0	0	0	Closed
XL30 Kelly's	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XL34 Allens	0	0	0	0	0	0	Closed March 2011
XL37 McCartney's	0	0	0	0	0	0	Closed April 2011
XL50 Burnside's	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XL61 Tom Paul's	0	0	0	0	0	0	Closed March 2011
XL63 Elder's	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XL65 Beattie's	0	0	0	0	0	0	

Category	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total	Comments
XL80 Miss Halls/Disp	0	0	0	0	0	0	Closed February 2011
XL89 Elliot's	0	0	0	0	0	0	Closed March 2011
XL99 Stewarts No. 1	0	0	0	0	0	0	Closed February 2011
XL100 Stewarts No. 2	0	0	0	0	0	0	Closed March 2011
XL120 Fairhill	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XL133 Wilsons	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XL137 Brown's	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XL139 The Float	0	0	0	0	0	0	Closed March 2011
XL141 Windy Hall	0	0	0	0	0	0	Closed September 2010
XL145 DOE	0	0	0	0	0	0	Closed July 2009
XL154 Hendersons	0	0	0	0	0	0	Closed February 2011
XL157 Gray's/National Trust	0	0	0	0	0	0	Closed May 2011
XL158 Conn's	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XL161 Golf Course	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XL164 Church	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XL172 Morrison's	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XL173 Begley's	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XL176 Brewster's	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XL183 Kelly's	0	0	0	0	0	0	Closed February 2011
XL187 McGrenaghan's	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XL211 Emergency Gate D	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XL212 Emergency Gate C	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XL218 Power Station Jetty	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XL219 Culmore	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XP230 Houstons	0	0	0	0	0	0	

Category	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total	Comments
XP243 Craigstown/ Lynch's	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XP244 Ballyreagh	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XR296 Martin's No. 1	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XR309 Donnelly's (B'Before)	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XR313 Quarry Cottages	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XR316 Land Crossing	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XR317 Unnamed	0	0	0	0	0	0	Closed March 2011
XR318 Wildfowlers No. 1	0	0	0	0	0	0	Closed February 2011
XR319 Land Crossing	0	0	0	0	0	0	Closed February 2011
XR320 Wildfowlers No. 2	0	0	0	0	0	0	Closed
XR321 Land Crossing	0	0	0	0	0	0	Closed February 2011
XA334 Simpsons	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XA335 Hamilton's	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XA343 Sheftons	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XA347 Wilsons	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XA347A Unnamed	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XA348 Mulhollands	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XA351 Well's No. 1	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XA352 Well's No. 2	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XA353 Well's No. 3	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XA354 Well's No. 4	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XA355 Stitt's	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XA356 Larmour's	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XA357 McRoberts	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XA358 McKillop's No. 1	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XA363 McKillop's No. 2	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XA364 Molyneaux	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XA366 Airport	0	0	0	0	0	0	

Category	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total	Comments
XA368 McCabe's No. 2	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XA374 Park's	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XA376 Land Crossing	0	0	0	0	0	0	
XA379 Sheep Pen	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	419	1232	809	663	475	3598	

* This crossing was closed by agreement in October 2008 but final works to close it off were not completed until 2010.

** This crossing was closed in January 2007 but an incident of trespass was reported in 2009.

Level Crossings: Safety at Skeganeagh

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of recorded safety incidents as XL 24 Skeganeagh level crossing in each of the last five years; and how much it would cost to install automatic barriers at this crossing.

(AQW 7818/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The number of recorded safety incidents at this crossing in the last five years are as detailed in the table below.

Crossing XL24	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	Total
Crossing Incident – Gates left open	46	135	92	57	10	0	340
Crossing Incident: Phones not used.	1	1	2	16	50	9	79
Near Miss	1	2	5	5	1	0	14
Total	48	138	99	78	61	9	433

Northern Ireland Railways has advised that an assessment would be needed to determine which type of barrier would be most appropriate for this location. It is unlikely, however, that an automatic half barrier crossing would be permitted at this location, given its proximity to the highway and the risk of blocking traffic. Installation of automatic half barriers would cost about £750,000. A full barrier crossing, supported by CCTV, would cost about £1.5m.

Fixed Penalty Notices: Bus Lanes

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development how many fixed penalty notices were issued for parking in a bus lane in each of the last five financial years.

(AQW 7841/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that details of the number of Penalty Charge Notices (PCN's) issued to vehicles parked in a bus lane in each of the last five financial years are shown in the table below:

Year	PCN's Issued
2007/08	912
2008/09	1132
2009/10	1080

Year	PCN's Issued
2010/11	1250
2011/12 (to end-Jan 2012)	871

Traffic Calming Schemes: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what traffic calming schemes are planned for the North Down area in the next financial year.

(AQW 7863/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it is currently preparing a programme of traffic calming schemes in North Down, however, the detailed budget for next financial year has not yet been agreed.

When finalised, details of the works programme, including traffic calming schemes, will be presented to the Council in the Spring and Autumn Council Reports. These reports can be accessed from my Department's internet site at the following web address:

http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information/cinformationtype-results.htm?signpost=Customer+information&informationType=Roads+Service+reports+to+councils

Rathgael Road, Bangor: Weight Restriction

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he would consider introducing a weight restriction on traffic using the Rathgael Road, Bangor.

(AQW 7864/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it has no plans to introduce a weight restriction on traffic using the Rathgael Road, Bangor.

Fuel Hedging

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department, and its arm's-length bodies, are engaged in fuel hedging to manage fluctuations in fuel prices.

(AQW 7899/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it does not engage in fuel hedging to manage fluctuations in fuel prices. Roads Service procures diesel fuel supplies, for use by its vehicles, via a UK-wide Central Government Framework contract and benefits from the aggregated buying power obtained by combining with public bodies across the UK.

Prices are set for the Framework contract and are adjusted weekly to reflect changes in factors such as the oil price and exchange rates.

NITHC/Translink does use fuel hedging, principally as a risk management tool to mitigate against variations in fuel costs and to provide greater certainty in financial planning. This practice is commonplace amongst transport companies.

Northern Ireland Water does not engage in fuel hedging.

Human Resources

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Regional Development how many staff are employed in his Department's Human Resources section.

(AQW 7941/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: There are currently 53 staff employed within my Department's Human Resources Branch.

Fuel: DRD Spend

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development how much his Department, and its arm's-length bodies, spent on fuel in each of the last five years.

(AQW 7972/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Expenditure on fuel by my Department and its Arms Length Bodies for the last five financial years is laid out below.

Body	Cost (£000'S)				
	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Roads Service	1,945	2,058	2,155	1,969	2,246
Northern Ireland Water	1,525 (Water Service)	1,913	2,379	2,261	1,801
NITHC/ Translink	24,617	27,103	35,705	38,416	32,796
Total	28,087	31,074	40,239	42,646	36,843

Belfast to Derry Railway Line: Passenger Numbers

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development, as the number of passengers travelling on the Belfast-Derry railway line compares favourably to those travelling on the Belfast-Dublin railway line, whether he will seek to have the Belfast-Derry railway line pre-identified on the EU Connecting Europe Facility list, so that it may be considered for investment in the future, perhaps as part of a western arc from Belfast-Derry-Cork, to accompany the present Trans European Network on the eastern arc of the island from Belfast-Dublin-Cork.

(AQW 8031/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Under the European Commission's proposals, Londonderry does not meet the criteria for inclusion on the TEN-T network as a Core Node. Unless Londonderry is included on the TEN-T core network, it will not be possible to avail of funding from the Connecting Europe Facility for the railway line from Belfast to Londonderry.

My officials have, however, been liaising with both the Department for Transport in London and the Department of Transport in Dublin in lobbying for the inclusion of Londonderry on the TEN-T core network. We have highlighted the need for the TEN-T criteria to recognise regional variance and circumstance and to avoid imposing standards with major cost implications.

I am not aware of plans at this time to extend the rail line from Londonderry to Cork. This is primarily an issue for the Republic of Ireland. I do, however, plan to take forward work to review the rail network in Northern Ireland for the period beyond the current budget. If any long term proposals are put by authorities in the Republic of Ireland for connections to Londonderry these could be considered further in that context.

Hospitality: Spend

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development what has been the total spend on hospitality by his Department in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8070/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The total spend on hospitality in each of the last five financial years is provided below.

Year	Total Cost
2006 / 07	£ 58,983
2007 / 08	£ 81,257

Year	Total Cost
2008 / 09	£ 59,447
2009 / 10	£ 44,498
2010 / 11	£ 39,648

Sewer Flooding: Ballycolman Estate, Strabane

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Regional Development whether any underlying infrastructure problems contributed to the substantial sewage overflow and flooding at the homes in the Ballycolman Estate, Strabane, on 9 February 2012; and what steps will be taken to remedy these problems.

(AQW 8152/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that there were no underlying infrastructure problems contributing to the out of sewer flooding which occurred at Ballycolman Estate, Strabane on 9 February 2012. The problem was caused by a combination of a sewer blockage and a mechanical failure at Ballycolman Wastewater Pumping Station. The mechanical failure was quickly rectified and measures have been put in place to reduce the risk of a recurrence.

Larne to Belfast Railway Line: Speed Restrictions

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the current extent and location of speed restrictions on the Larne to Belfast railway line; and when they will be removed.

(AQW 8229/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink have reported the current Train Speed Restrictions as set out in the table below:

Location	Line	Mileposts		Speed (MPH)	Reason	Work required	Planned Date for removal
		From	To				
Glynn	Single	22.50	21.00	40	Track condition	Replace rails	December 2012
Cloghan Point	Single	13.50	13.25	30	Cutting slip	Works to stabilise cuttings	March 2013

There is also a 50 MPH speed restriction at Bleach Green between Jordanstown and Whiteabbey for Londonderry Line trains. However, this does not affect Larne Line trains because the permanent speed restriction is 50 MPH for Larne trains due to track curvature at the points where the lines split.

Department for Social Development

Derelict Land or Property: Deprived Wards

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the locations of any derelict land or property owned by his Department which is in the top 10 percent of the most deprived wards.

(AQW 7222/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The Urban Regeneration and Community Development Group holds a number of sites, which are in the top 10 percent of the most deprived wards. These sites are cleared, made safe, secured and maintained as part of the Group's portfolio of assets and are held for future regeneration or resale, if considered surplus to requirements. Whilst

the Department does not consider these sites to be derelict, their locations are nevertheless detailed below.

Ward	Site Location
New Lodge, Belfast	Carrick Hill, Belfast
Shankill, Belfast	Corner of Samuel Street & Millfield, Belfast
Shankill, Belfast	Corner of North Street & Millfield, Belfast
Shankill, Belfast	Samuel Street, Belfast
Waterworks, Belfast	Girdwood Park, North Belfast
Shankill, Belfast	Land at Greenland Street
Shankill, Belfast	Car Park at Alessie Centre
Shankill, Belfast	Former Probation Board Site
Shankill, Belfast	141-145 Shankill Road
Shankill, Belfast	278-282 & 284-296 Shankill Road
Shankill, Belfast	Land at Lanark Way/Mayo Link
Shankill, Belfast	Land at Mayo Street/Mayo Link
Shankill, Belfast	Site G Merkland Place
Crumlin, Belfast	Former Savoy Cinema
Crumlin, Belfast	Land at Oldpark Road
Waterworks Belfast	118-120 Antrim Road
Duncairn Belfast	Land at Adam Street
Duncairn Belfast	28 Duncairn Gardens
Duncairn Belfast	184 North Queen Street
Duncairn Belfast	10-12 York Road
Duncairn Belfast	50-58 York Road
Shaftesbury Belfast	301-303 Donegall Road
Shaftesbury Belfast	Armagh House 11a Ormeau Ave.
Blackstaff Belfast	25 Rydalmere Street
Falls Belfast	Land at Willow Street/Grosvenor Road
Falls Belfast	Land adjacent to 87 Durham Court
Upper Springfield Belfast	Springfield Road Sites (4)
Beechmount Belfast	Land at Westrock.Mica Drive
Clonard Belfast	Springfield Pond, Springfield Road
Woodstock Belfast	Land at Ravenhill Reach/Ormeau Embankment
The Mount Belfast	130-138 Castlreagh St & 60-64 Clandeboye St
The Mount Belfast	139-141 Albertbridge Road

Ward	Site Location
The Mount Belfast	275-277 Albertbridge Road
The Mount Belfast	2-10 Castlereagh Street
The Mount Belfast	1a Stormount Lane
The Mount Belfast	16-24 Castlereagh Street
The Mount Belfast	183-191 Beersbridge Road
The Mount Belfast	211-217 Beersbridge Road
Ballymacarret Belfast	155-157 Newtownards Road
Ballymacarret Belfast	232 Newtownards Road
Ballymacarret Belfast	Land at 98/98A Templemore Avenue
Colin Glen Lisburn	Bogstown Glen, Poleglass
Colin Glen Lisburn	Laurel Glen, Poleglass
Colin Glen Lisburn	Stewartstown Glen, Poleglass
Colin Glen Lisburn	St Kierans Area, Poleglass
Colin Glen Lisburn	Land at Old Colin Road, Poleglass
Colin Glen Lisburn	Community Garden, Bellsteele Road, Poleglass
Brandywell Londonderry	Land at Jacqueline Way
The Diamond Londonderry	St Augustines Site
The Diamond Londonderry	Richmond Chambers
The Diamond Londonderry	City Hotel Site
The Diamond Londonderry	Newmarket Street
Shantallow West Londonderry	Galliagh Linear Park
Strand Londonderry	William St/ Chamberlain Street
Victoria Londonderry	Spencer Road Car Park
Victoria Londonderry	Spencer Road/ Lower Fountain Hill
Central Coleraine	Mall Carpark
Farranshane Antrim	Stiles Way
Farranshane Antrim	13 Birchill Road Stiles Way
Farranshane Antrim	11 Birchill Road Stiles Way
Farranshane Antrim	18 Birchill Road Stiles Way
Ballee Ballymena	Antrim Road
Ballee Ballymena	Larne Road
Ballee Ballymena	Ballee Road East
Ballee Ballymena	18 Antrim Road
Drumgask Craigavon	8 Moyraverty Road

Ward	Site Location
Drumgask Craigavon	Moyraferty Road
Drumgask Craigavon	20 Brownlow Road
Drumgask Craigavon	Rathmore
Drumgask Craigavon	Brownlow Road
Drumgask Craigavon	Drumellan Road

Recruitment Agencies: DSD Spend

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the amount paid to recruitment agencies for (i) full-time; and (ii) part-time posts in his Department, and its arm's-length bodies, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 7651/11-15)

Mr McCausland: It is not possible to provide separate details between full-time and part-time posts, therefore the total amount paid to recruitment agencies by this Department and its arm's-length bodies over the last 3 years is detailed in the table below:

2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
£1,405,091	£1,872,829	£1,315,599

Crisis Loans

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development, for each district council area, to detail the number of Crisis Loan applications made during the timeframe attached to Annex 2 of 'Replacement of the Existing Discretionary Social Fund Scheme in Northern Ireland – Research Study Specification - A Draft Final Report to the Social Security Agency' which was tabled at the Social Development Committee on 26 January 2012; and of these (i) the total value of the applications made; (ii) the number of applications that were successful; (iii) the total value of the Crisis Loans awarded; (iv) the amount of money initially awarded to each recipient; (v) the number of appeals; and (vi) the amount awarded to each recipient on appeal.

(AQW 7787/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The total number of Crisis Loan applications, for each district council area is detailed in Column 2 of the table overleaf.

- (i) The total value of applications made during the specified timeframe is £31,194,000. A breakdown for each district council area is detailed in Column 3 of the table overleaf.
- (ii) The number of applications that were successful in the specified timeframe is 120,608. A breakdown for each district council area is detailed in Column 4 of the table overleaf.
- (iii) The total value of Crisis Loans awarded is £16,173,000. A breakdown for each district council area is detailed in Column 5 of the table overleaf.
- (iv) The amount of money initially awarded to each recipient is not available as it would involve individually checking in excess of 120,000 applications.
- (v) There is no right of appeal against a Crisis Loan decision, therefore the number of appeals is nil.
- (vi) There is no right of appeal against a Crisis Loan decision, therefore no amounts were awarded on appeal.

TABLE OF CRISIS LOAN APPLICATIONS AND AWARDS 2010/2011 YEAR BY COUNCIL AREA

Local Government District	No of Crisis Loans applications*	Total amount applied for (£)	No of Successful Crisis Loan Applicants*	Total Amount Awarded for successful applications (£)
Unknown*	384	141,000	334	61,000
Antrim Borough Council	2,923	634,000	2,423	414,000
Ards Borough Council	4,474	881,000	3,810	537,000
Armagh City and District Council	3,083	534,000	1,799	194,000
Ballymena Borough Council	4,384	1,022,000	3,513	507,000
Ballymoney Borough Council	1,090	248,000	626	104,000
Banbridge District Council	3,019	658,000	1,795	267,000
Belfast City Council	45,793	9,603,000	34,809	4,570,000
Carrickfergus Borough Council	5,006	1,035,000	3,546	456,000
Castlereagh Borough Council	2,553	535,000	2,155	267,000
Coleraine Borough Council	3,292	782,000	2,147	346,000
Cookstown District Council	2,140	510,000	1,466	210,000
Craigavon Borough Council	8,283	1,501,000	5,917	901,000
Derry City Council	11,722	1,948,000	11,162	1,370,000
Down District Council	8,483	1,751,000	6,843	975,000
Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council	4,238	747,000	3,408	364,000
Fermanagh District Council	3,888	561,000	3,612	386,000
Larne Borough Council	3,082	648,000	2,139	296,000
Limavady Borough Council	2,244	489,000	1,972	334,000
Lisburn City Council	7,479	1,553,000	6,437	934,000
Magherafelt District Council	2,643	595,000	1,867	286,000
Moyle District Council	716	164,000	485	70,000
Newry and Mourne District Council	5,371	1,070,000	3,393	411,000
Newtownabbey Borough Council	6,048	1,379,000	4,485	688,000
North Down Borough Council	4,890	997,000	4,095	507,000

Local Government District	No of Crisis Loans applications*	Total amount applied for (£)	No of Successful Crisis Loan Applicants*	Total Amount Awarded for successful applications (£)
Omagh District Council	3,672	614,000	2,568	275,000
Strabane District Council	3,994	595,000	3,802	445,000
Total	154,894	31,194,000**	120,608	16,173,000**

* People can make multiple applications throughout the year. This is particularly pertinent when divided by population estimations as you may be double counting. Estimates are provided for mid-2010.

** All figures are rounded to the nearest 1,000. Individual figures will not sum to totals due to rounding.

The Information provided is an Official Statistic. The Production and dissemination of all such Statistics is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Girdwood Site: Shared Sports Facility

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development (i) for an update on the plans for the Girdwood Barracks site; and (ii) whether he will consider a proposal from three local schools for a shared sports facility on the site.

(AQW 7813/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My department is currently reviewing the implementation of the draft masterplan for the Girdwood site and former Crumlin Road Gaol. Following consultation with OFMDFM and other stakeholders I aim to announce the way forward as soon as possible. As part of the implementation review my department is considering all of the uses for the site proposed in the draft masterplan which includes the provision of a sports facility.

ATOS Healthcare Induction Programme

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the differences in the study materials that are provided as part of the ATOS Healthcare Induction Programme for healthcare practitioners in Northern Ireland compared with other areas of the UK.

(AQW 7852/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The study materials provided as part of the Atos Healthcare Induction programme for healthcare practitioners in Northern Ireland are identical to those provided to healthcare practitioners undertaking assessments in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Civil Service: Posts

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development how many Civil Service posts existed in his Department at (i) Administrative Assistant; (ii) Administrative Officer; (iii) Executive Officer 2; (iv) Executive Officer 1; (v) Staff Officer; (vi) Deputy Principal; (vii) Grade 7; and (viii) Grade 6 levels, at the beginning of (a) 2007; and (b) 2012, broken down by local Council area.

(AQW 7857/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested at January 2012 is provided in the following table:

Grade	Number of Posts
Grade 6	11.00
Grade 7	88.67

Grade	Number of Posts
Deputy Principal	199.30
Staff Officer	402.21
Executive Officer 1	598.51
Executive Officer 2/Social Security Officer 1	1858.83
Administrative Officer/Social Security Officer 2	3229.42
Administrative Assistant	514.77
Total	6902.71

Data on the Department's funded posts at January 2007 cannot accurately be disaggregated to provide the information you have requested. However, at that date the Department had a full time equivalent staffing complement of 7418.84 permanent posts, the comparable figure for January 2012 was 7052.32.

The figure for January 2012 of 7052.32 differs from that shown in the table above as it includes a number of other grades not requested in the question.

Information on the Department's staffing position is not held by Council area.

Human Resources

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Social Development how many staff are employed in his Department's Human Resources section.

(AQW 7882/11-15)

Mr McCausland: 149 people (134 whole time equivalent) are currently employed in this Department's Human Resources Division. The Division has responsibility for the provision of Human Resource services to 7,474 staff within the Department and the Social Security Agency and for the management of a range of other corporate services including accommodation and Security and Emergency Planning.

Volunteer Centres: Protective Notice

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how many staff in local volunteer centres have been put on protective notice; and (ii) how he intends to ensure that the work of independent volunteer centres continues to make a return on investment for local economies.

(AQW 7903/11-15)

Mr McCausland:

- (i) As Departmental funding arrangements are to provide support to the delivery of outputs/outcomes and not for staffing posts, the Department does not assume the rights and responsibilities of an employer and as such would not be in a position to advise on the number of staff in local volunteer centres that have been put on protective notice.
- (ii) My Department has developed Northern Ireland's first ever Volunteering Strategy and Action Plan. Implementation of the Action Plan envisages the contractual engagement of a strategic partner to assist in delivering regional volunteering services and up to five local partnerships for delivering on local volunteering actions. This selection process is expected to be completed by the end of the summer 2012 and all existing volunteer centres will have the opportunity to consider applying to become a delivery partner under these new infrastructure arrangements. It is planned that existing arrangements will continue until the new volunteering infrastructure arrangements are in place.

Housing Executive Properties: Mould and Damp

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how many Housing Executive properties in the (a) South Belfast; and (b) East Belfast areas have reported problems with mould and dampness in the last three years; and (ii) what measures the Housing Executive has taken to address this matter. **(AQW 7908/11-15)**

Mr McCausland: Over the last three years the Housing Executive has received the following number of reports of problems with mould and dampness: -

- 542 from tenants in South Belfast District office area
- 582 from tenants in East Belfast District office area

Mould growth is the main symptom of condensation and may be confused for damp. It is best treated by regular ventilation of the property. Where the Housing Executive is aware of condensation in a property the tenant will be advised that it can be prevented by:-

- Allowing air to circulate throughout the property by opening doors occasionally
- Using extractor fans in kitchens and bathrooms
- Opening windows when cooking
- Not blocking air vents
- Drying clothes outside if possible
- Ensuring there is ventilation in the property, especially bedrooms, during the night.

Reports of damp are assessed by the Housing Executive's maintenance staff and contractors on a case by case basis and the necessary remedial action is taken. Typical examples of work carried out would be:-

- Damp proof course
- Installation of extractor fans in kitchens
- Checking of water pipes in kitchens and bathrooms
- Cleaning of outside guttering to prevent water penetration
- Inspection of roofs and external doors

Every Housing Executive tenant is provided with a tenant's handbook at the start of their tenancy which includes advice on condensation. The Housing Executive also has a separate condensation advice leaflet which is available in all of their District offices and also online at www.nihe.gov.uk.

Income Support: Belfast/Derry/Armagh

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the percentage of adults on Income Support in the (i) Belfast; (ii) Armagh; and (iii) Derry City areas. **(AQW 7912/11-15)**

Mr McCausland: The table below shows the number of people aged 16 to 59 in receipt of Income Support compared to the total population aged 16 to 59 in the (i) Belfast City Council; (ii) Armagh City and District Council; and (iii) Derry City Council areas, expressed as a percentage:

Local Government District	Percentage of claimants
Belfast City Council	12.6%
Armagh City and District Council	5.6%
Derry City Council	12.6%

Data Source: Northern Ireland Benefits Statistics Summary August 2011

The Information provided is an Official Statistic. The Production and dissemination of all such Statistics is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Housing Executive Properties: Comber

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how many Housing Executive properties in the Comber area will have natural gas installed in this financial year, broken down by local areas; and (ii) the total associated costs.

(AQW 7960/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The vast majority of Housing Executive properties in the Comber area already have oil-fired central heating. However, seven properties will receive gas heating at a cost of approximately £46,000. These properties are included in a scheme which went on-site in January 2012 and are in the Darragh Road and Graffon Gardens areas. There are currently no heating schemes programmed for 2012/13.

Housing Executive Properties: Comber

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how many Housing Executive properties in the Comber area will have new kitchens installed in this financial year, broken down by local area; and (ii) the total associated costs.

(AQW 7961/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are no kitchen replacement schemes scheduled for Comber during the current financial year. However, in the next financial year, 2012/13, 137 dwellings in Comber are programmed for kitchen replacements at an estimated cost of £767,000. The locations of these properties are:-

Darragh Road	44 properties
De Wind	18 properties
The Royals	26 properties
Graffon, Laburnum & Park Crescent	49 properties

Housing Executive Properties: Newtownards/Comber

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how many Housing Executive properties in the (a) Glen Estate in Newtownards; and (b) Comber area will have new windows installed in this financial year, broken down by the areas within the estate and the Comber area; and (ii) the total associated costs.

(AQW 7962/11-15)

Mr McCausland: New double glazing windows are being installed in 271 properties in the Glen Estate, Newtownards; and in 47 properties in the Comber area (Crescent Grove/Mews and at Laburnum and Lower Crescent). This work will be carried out in a scheme which is programmed for March 2012 at a total estimated cost of £731,000.

The Housing Executive is working to identify any properties which still require double glazing and once this information is available, as required in the draft Programme for Government, by March 2012 it will prepare a programme for the installation of glazing to all Housing Executive homes by the end of 2015.

Poverty: Rural Dwellers

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage of rural dwellers that are deemed to be living in poverty.

(AQW 7987/11-15)

Mr McCausland: During the year 2008/09 the number and percentage of individuals living below the relative poverty line for rural areas is presented in Table 1. The results are produced using the Family Resources Survey datasets for Northern Ireland, and the Urban Rural Report for Northern Ireland.

Table 1:

2008/09 Area	Before Housing Costs (BHC)		After Housing Costs (AHC)	
	Number of Individuals in relative low income	Percentage of Individuals in relative low income	Number of Individuals in relative low income	Percentage of Individuals in relative low income
Rural East	..	19	..	21
Rural West	130,400	27	123,800	26
All Rural	190,500	24	189,000	24
Northern Ireland	372,400	21	366,500	21

The Information provided is an Official Statistic. The Production and dissemination of all such Statistics is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Training Programmes: Enrolments

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister for Social Development whether he is aware of the problems that young people, aged or approaching the age of 18, who wish to enrol in training programmes face because they are deemed ineligible as they are not in receipt of JobSeekers Allowance since their parents are receiving Child Benefit, which cannot be terminated until it expires; and what plans he has to resolve this problem to ensure that young people are not prevented from entering these programmes.

(AQW 8020/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I understand that the Department for Employment and Learning provides a guarantee of a training place through their Training for Success programme to those who are unemployed and in the 16 and 17 year old age group, with extended eligibility for those with a disability or from an in-care background.

A young person who reaches age 18 on or after 2nd July and before the second Monday in September, will be treated as a young person within the guarantee group provided that the young person starts training during the week commencing the first Monday of September. Receipt of Jobseekers Allowance is not a pre-requisite for entitlement to join the Training for Success programme.

Families of young people aged 16-19 who are participating in training through the Training for Success programme may be entitled to Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit up to their 20th birthday or until their training ceases.

The Steps to Work programme is also available to anyone seeking employment, who is aged 18 years old or over (lone parents aged 16 or over) and unemployed or economically inactive. Young people on Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) join the programme once they are on JSA for six months but may seek to join earlier at their local Jobs & Benefits office / Jobcentre.

Questions for Written Answer: Stationery Costs

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development how much his Department has spent on stationery costs in replying to Assembly Written Questions, including the price of the envelopes and paper used, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8047/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department does not routinely calculate the costs of replying to Assembly Written Questions including identifying the price of envelopes and paper used.

Work Capability Assessments

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development (i) for his assessment of the statement made by the Minister for Employment, Chris Grayling MP, on 1 February 2012, on the recording of Work Capability Assessments: “On audio recording, we will offer everyone who wants it the opportunity to have their session recorded. We decided not to implement universal recording because, based on the trial experience, people did not want it. Few people wanted their sessions recorded, and some said that they definitely did not. We decided therefore to offer recording as an option to those who want it. That seems entirely sensible”; and (ii) whether the same arrangements will be put in place in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 8060/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Department of Work and Pensions recently trialled the audio recording of Work Capability Assessments as recommended by Professor Harrington in his Year 1 review. The Social Security Agency has reviewed the Department of Work and Pensions evaluation report and has now introduced audio recording for those customers who request it.

Social Housing: Five-/Six-bedroom Units

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of social housing units with five or six bedrooms, broken down by council area.

(AQW 8061/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested for Housing Executive properties as they do not routinely collate information by District Council area. However, Table 1 below gives details of the number of five and six bedroom Housing Executive properties by their district office area. Table 2 below gives details by Council area of the number of five and six bedroom Housing Association properties.

TABLE 1 – HOUSING EXECUTIVE

NIHE District	5 Bedroom Properties	6 Bedroom Properties
East Belfast	9	0
West Belfast	44	1
South Belfast	20	0
North Belfast	45	2
Shankill	3	0
Belfast Total	121	3
Antrim	3	1
Ballycastle	1	0
Ballymena	4	0
Ballymoney	1	0
Carrickfergus	2	0
Coleraine	2	0
Larne	0	0
Newtownabbey 1	2	0

NIHE District	5 Bedroom Properties	6 Bedroom Properties
Newtownabbey 2	5	3
North East Total	20	4
Bangor	4	0
Castlereagh	1	0
Downpatrick	6	1
Lisburn	14	1
Lisburn Dairyfarm	54	1
Newtownards	8	3
South East Total	87	6
Armagh	2	0
Dungannon	12	4
Fermanagh	13	0
Lurgan	24	0
Portadown	4	0
Newry	19	1
South Area Total	74	5
Waterloo Place	14	0
Waterside	4	0
Collon Terrace	25	1
Limavady	8	0
Magherafelt	4	0
Cookstown	4	0
Omagh	5	2
Strabane	7	0
West Area Total	71	3
NI Total	373	21

TABLE 2 – HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS

Council Area	5 Bedroom Properties	6 Bedroom Properties
Antrim Borough Council	1	1
Ards Borough Council	-	-
Armagh City & District Council	-	-
Ballymena Borough Council	1	-
Ballymoney Borough Council	-	-

Council Area	5 Bedroom Properties	6 Bedroom Properties
Banbridge District Council	-	-
Belfast City Council	65	2
Carrickfergus Borough Council	2	-
Castlereagh Borough Council	-	-
Coleraine Borough Council	-	1
Cookstown District Council	2	-
Craigavon Borough Council	2	2
Derry City Council	9	1
Down District Council	1	1
Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council	2	-
Fermanagh District Council	1	1
Larne Borough Council	-	-
Limavady Borough Council	1	-
Lisburn City Council	22	-
Magherafelt District Council	3	-
Moyle District Council	-	-
Newry & Mourne District Council	3	-
Newtownabbey Borough Council		-
North Down Borough Council	1	-
Omagh District Council	1	-
Strabane District Council	3	-
Total	120	9

The Information provided is an Official Statistic. The Production and dissemination of all such Statistics is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Disability Assessments: Royston House, Belfast

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many people, in each of the last three years, who should have gone to Royston House, Belfast, for disability assessment, availed of an assessment elsewhere.

(AQW 8064/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is not held by the Department.

Disability Assessments: Travel Assistance

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what alternative arrangements are in place for people who are unable to travel to Royston House, Belfast, for a disability assessment.

(AQW 8065/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In the event that a customer is unable to travel to Royston House Belfast for a disability assessment they will be offered an appointment at an alternative Medical Examination Centre. In the event that a customer is unable to attend a Medical Examination Centre due to their disability an assessment may be carried out in their home.

Housing Executive Tenants: Evictions

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive tenants have been evicted from their properties as a result of criminal or anti-social behaviour in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8066/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The figures below show the number of Housing Executive repossessions in relation to criminal or anti-social behaviour in each of the last five years:

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Total repossessions	17	33	43	54	62

Laganside Events Grant Scheme

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister for Social Development (i) why he has closed the Laganside Events Grant; and (ii) why local organisations were not consulted before this decision was made.

(AQW 8075/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I welcome the announcement from the Finance Minister that he is prepared to make £200,000 available to my Department to enable grant assistance to Laganside Events Grant scheme to continue for one additional year. In addition to this funding I have made £50,000 available, also for one year.

This scheme has always been regarded as discretionary expenditure by the Department and is reviewed annually to determine whether it continues to be affordable and necessary expenditure for the Department given our wide range of functions and other funding priorities. Grant recipient organisations are therefore aware that there has never been an open-ended commitment to provide this grant which has contributed to the overall mix of funding available for the Arts and Culture sectors from other statutory bodies such as the Arts Council NI and Belfast City Council.

Social Housing: Loughview Estate, Holywood

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the timescale for the delivery of new social housing at West Green, Loughview Estate, Holywood.

(AQW 8103/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Clanmil Housing Association was nominated in November 2011 to deliver this scheme in West Green Holywood. Subject to receiving the necessary approvals, they expect to be on site during the 2012/13 year.

Social Housing: Loughview Estate, Holywood

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the process by which the Housing Association responsible for the delivery of new social housing at West Green, Loughview Estate, Holywood was selected.

(AQW 8104/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive, in conjunction with the Department and the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA), developed selection criteria to be applied for all Land Transfer General Needs New build Schemes to be included in the Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP).

The criteria, which are evidence based, are used to determine which Registered Housing Association's (RHA's) can be nominated to deliver Transfer Schemes. Each housing association interested in being nominated for Land Transfer schemes is required to make application to the Housing Executive and each application is assessed by a panel against the agreed criteria. This process is usually carried out every 3 years and is due to be reviewed in 2013.

The allocation of land transfer schemes is carried out annually with all successful housing associations being allocated a proportionate number of land transfer units in line with their ranking against the criteria.

It should be noted the selection process is not applied in respect of individual land transfer schemes but instead it is an assessment of housing associations in terms of their capability to deliver land transfer schemes generally.

It was this process that was used to nominate Clanmil Housing Association for the Land Transfer scheme at West Green, Holywood as part of the 2012/13 land transfer programme.

Social Housing: Loughview Estate, Holywood

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the level of funding allocated for new social housing at West Green, Loughview Estate, Holywood.

(AQW 8105/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The final plans and therefore the cost for the proposed new build development at West Green will be dependent on the number of units that Planning Service ultimately permit to be built on the site.

Our initial assessment is that the site could potentially deliver up to 55 units that at today's costs could total up to £6 million. Clanmil are already working to bring forward a detailed planning application that when approved will allow me to give a more definitive outline of the scheme costs.

Holywood Town Centre: Masterplan

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development what consultation will be carried out in relation to the Masterplan for Holywood Town Centre and the associated streetscaping works.

(AQW 8106/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department will establish an advisory group comprising representatives from organisations such as North Down Borough Council, DRD, DOE, Town Centre Management and the local residents groups to assist with the development of the Masterplan and the concept plans for the proposed public realm scheme. The Masterplan process will also allow for a 12 week public consultation process on all regeneration proposals for the town centre.

Holywood Town Centre: Public Realm Scheme

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the level of funding allocated for the streetscaping works for Holywood town centre.

(AQW 8107/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Plans for a public realm improvement scheme in Holywood are still at an early stage of development and no funding has been committed to it at this stage. However, my Department has included £1 million in its forward work programme for a public realm scheme in Holywood during 2014/15, subject to funding being available and all necessary approvals being in place.

Hospitality: Spend

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 6359/11-15, whether the figures include his Department's arm's-length bodies; and if not, to provide this information for each of the last five years.

(AQW 8119/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The figures in my response to AQW 6359/11-15 covered only the Department's hospitality costs as per the original Question. The hospitality costs for the Department's arm's-length bodies for the last 5 years are now included in the table below.

DEPARTMENT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT HOSPITALITY COSTS INCLUDING EXPENDITURE BY ARM'S LENGTH BODIES £

2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
97,905	94,039	154,274	105,684	49,695

Disability Living Allowance: Welfare Reform Changes

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department has any plans to minimise the impact of the coalition Government's changes to Disability Living Allowance which will affect people with mental, physical and learning disabilities.

(AQW 8159/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The coalition Government's Welfare Reform Bill currently before Parliament includes plans to replace Disability Living Allowance with a new Personal Independence Payment which will assess a person's ability to perform a range of everyday tasks. Development work on the proposals for the assessment criteria has been undertaken in conjunction with a group of independent specialists in health, social care and disability, which includes disabled people. The criteria will take account of physical, sensory, mental, intellectual and cognitive impairments.

The development of the proposals is an iterative process and changes have already been made to the assessment criteria as a result of consultation and testing against current DLA cases. So changes to the criteria are being built in as they are developed. My officials and I are in constant contact with the Department for Work and Pensions and ensured that Northern Ireland cases were included in testing. A revised draft of the assessment criteria including the proposed entitlement thresholds has been published for consultation and I would encourage people to take this opportunity to provide input to the development of the assessment criteria to ensure they reflect their individual circumstances.

Work is ongoing to fully assess the impact of the introduction of Personal Independence Payment. I am working with the Executive Sub-Committee on Welfare Reform to explore ways to mitigate any potential impact which may emerge from this work.

Benefits: Over £26,000

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 7048/11-15, why he was unable to provide the exact number of households which received benefits in excess of £26,000; and (ii) when he will be able to do so.

(AQW 8167/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In order to provide an exact number of households receiving benefits in excess of £26,000 per annum, my Department would be required to undertake a detailed analysis of the 550,000 people currently receiving social security benefits, Working Tax Credits, Child Benefit and Housing Benefit. Currently the data from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs is not available to the Department and officials are therefore unable to construct an appropriate longitudinal model. As an alternative my Department has used the Northern Ireland version of the Department for Work and

Pensions Policy Simulation Model which estimates that approximately 99% of all households claiming Housing Benefit will not be affected by the proposed benefit cap of £26,000.

The Policy Simulation Model is based on data derived from the 2008/09 Family Resource Survey. The results of any analysis produced from survey data will always be subject to some degree of statistical error. In addition the statistical modelling that was conducted to assess the impact of the benefit cap produced very low numbers. For both reasons it was not possible to release a firm estimate as to the number of households affected at this stage.

In their most recent Impact Assessment, the Department for Work and Pensions estimated that 67,000 households will be affected by the benefit cap at the outset and this was accrued from analysis of administrative datasets covering Social Security Benefits, Tax Credits, Child Benefit and Housing Benefit claimants.

The Department for Social Development is currently awaiting Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (tax) data to enable replication of the Department for Work and Pensions figure. As soon as the data is available the Department will look to provide a firmer estimation of those affected by the proposed benefit cap. It is important to note that the administrative data will only provide the current position of the data and further analysis will be required to determine the situation in 2014/2015

Housing Executive Properties: Millisle

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses in Millisle village are owned by the Housing Executive.

(AQW 8171/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive currently owns 142 properties in Millisle.

Work Capability Assessments

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Social Development when final approval will be given to those individuals whom ATOS Healthcare wishes to appoint to carry out Work Capability Assessments.

(AQW 8241/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The final approval is given only when the required training has been successfully completed and the agreed audit standards have been met by the healthcare professionals.

Fuel: DSD Spend

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development how much his Department, and its agencies, have spent on fuel in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8248/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The amounts spent on fuel in the last five years are as set out in the following table. All figures are to the nearest £1 and those for the Department include costs incurred by the Social Security Agency (SSA), whilst those for the NI Housing Executive (a non-departmental public body of this Department) are shown separately.

	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12 (year to date)
Department (including SSA)	3,456	4,442	4,846	4,441	6,518
NI Housing Executive	155,916	236,252	164,756	199,103	143,314
Totals	159,372	240,694	169,602	203,544	149,832

Housing Executive Properties: Vacant in West Belfast

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development how many of the 2,242 vacant Housing Executive properties are in the West Belfast constituency.

(AQW 8275/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not routinely collate information by Parliamentary constituency. However, across the Housing Executive's District Offices in West Belfast, Shankill and Lisburn Dairy Farm, there were 303 vacant properties at 31 December 2011. Of these, 33 were categorised as awaiting relet, 218 pending sale/demolition, 49 undergoing repairs and 3 others which include SPED and squatters.

FirstBuy NI Scheme

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development how many properties have been purchased through the FirstBuy NI scheme since it was introduced.

(AQW 8306/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Disappointingly, no applications for assistance under the FirstBuy NI pilot scheme have been received. Given this, the funding has been re-allocated to support purchases under the main Co-Ownership Scheme. Any applications for assistance under FirstBuy NI that are received before 31 March 2012 and qualify for help will be accommodated from this funding within the main scheme.

FirstBuyNI Scheme

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development whether he plans to provide further funding for the FirstBuy NI scheme.

(AQW 8307/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department allocated £3.25m to pilot the FirstBuy NI scheme. Funding must be taken up before the 31 March 2012. Due to the lack of take up, which was not anticipated by the Department or the Sector, the FirstBuy NI funding has been reallocated to the Co-Ownership Scheme. As such, I have no plans to extend the pilot scheme. Any applications received for FirstBuy NI before the close of the year will be accommodated under the Co-ownership Scheme.

Co-ownership Scheme: Funding

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development whether he plans to increase funding for the Co-Ownership scheme.

(AQW 8310/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In recognition of the difficult position faced by those seeking to gain, or re-establish, a foothold on the housing ladder I have already increased the funding available for affordable housing through schemes such as Co-Ownership. I have committed to investing at least £103.25 million in affordable housing over the four years up to 2014/15. Investment in Co-Ownership Housing will total over £28 million this year enabling over 650 affordable homes to be purchased; this is £10m more than last year.

Warm Homes Scheme: Turkington Construction

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development (i) why Turkington Construction was able to acquire heating grants through the Warm Homes Scheme after purchasing houses in the Mahon Road Army Barracks, Portadown; and (ii) whether the value placed on the properties reflected that new heating systems were required.

(AQW 8340/11-15)

Mr McCausland: No heating grants have been paid to Turkington Construction. The Warm Homes Scheme is available to eligible, private sector households who are either owner occupiers or private

sector tenants. Every property that has measures installed under the Warm Homes Scheme must be occupied by an eligible householder and lack one or more of the measures available under the scheme. These ex MOD properties had been bought by Turkington Construction and were then privately rented. The properties were identified through a marketing initiative carried out by the Warm Homes Scheme Manager for the Portadown area. The houses had been heated by LPG and the Warm Homes Scheme installed new oil heating systems for these eligible householders.

Boiler Replacement Scheme

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development what is the final date for people to submit applications for the Boiler Replacement scheme.

(AQW 8390/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme ends on 31 March 2012. The pilot scheme has been very successful and is currently fully subscribed and the Housing Executive are not in a position to accept new applications. Installers engaged in carrying out boiler replacement for applications which have already been approved, should ensure works have been completed and electrical certificate and Building Control certificates are submitted to their local Grant Office before 31 March 2012.

Boiler Replacement Scheme

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development when the current Boiler Replacement Scheme ends.

(AQW 8419/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I launched the pilot Boiler Scheme in June 2011 and I ring-fenced £2 million from the 2011/2012 Fuel Poverty Budget to deliver the pilot scheme. The target for the pilot scheme was to replace 1,330 inefficient boilers in low income households. The pilot scheme has been very successful, is currently fully subscribed and will end on 31 March 2012.

Fuel Allowance Payments

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the earliest and latest date on which people who qualify for the one-off fuel allowance payment by virtue of being in receipt of Pension Credit, Income Support, Employment and Support Allowance, and Job Seekers Allowance, can expect to receive payment.

(AQW 8462/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The first tranche of Fuel Allowance Payments to over 253,000 people will be made between 22 February and the 27 February 2012. This will result in over 99% of all customers who will be eligible receiving the payment. After this initial phase there will be a small number of newly identified recipients that is, new benefit claims processed since the initial scan of the benefit systems and benefit entitlement has been backdated to the qualifying week. Arrangements have been put in place to both identify and pay these customers. This will lead to further round of automatic payments to be issued in week commencing 20 March, any payments after that will be made clerically.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Art and Antique Works: Value

Mr McKay asked the Assembly Commission what is the total value of the art and antique works, which are owned by the Assembly, that are not currently on display; and whether any consideration has been given to the sale of some of these works.

(AQW 7764/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): Following a valuation in December 2010, I can confirm that the total value of the art and antique works which are owned by the Assembly and which are not on display is as follows;

Description	Value for insurance purposes
Portrait of Rt. Hon JM Andrews by F McKelvey	£2,000
Portrait of Rt. Hon, Sir Basil Brooke Bart Prime Minister for N.I 1943-63	Unfortunately this painting could not be valued at the time of the visit
Portrait of Viscount Craigavon by N Becher	£3,000
Portrait of Sir Henry Wilson by HW Gates	£1,500
Portrait of Lord Armaghdale by Riviere	£2,000
Portrait of Frederick Temple by C Williams	£3,000
Oil painting, an Obelisk at the Boyne by J Tudor	£250,000
Total Value	£ 261,500
Print of Sydenham, Belmont & surrounding area	This item was not valued due to its low value.
Print showing service for Queen Victoria's Jubilee	This item was not valued due to its low value.
Photograph of Queen Victoria	This item was not valued due to its low value.
Large framed display of Historic Parliamentary Occasions 1945	This item was not valued due to its low value.
Framed sealed indenture of Stormont Estate	This item was not valued due to its low value.
Collection of miscellaneous photographs of Parliament Buildings and historic events therein	This item was not valued due to its low value.

The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission has not considered selling any of these works as they were gifted to the Assembly and the Commission would act merely as custodians for the people of Northern Ireland.

I do hope that the above information provides the detail that you sought, however should you require any supplementary information I would be very happy to assist with your enquiry.

Parliament Buildings: Heating and Electricity

Mr Flanagan asked the Assembly Commission to detail (i) how much (a) gas or oil for heating; and (b) electricity has been used in Parliament Buildings in each of the last three years; (ii) how much of this (a) gas or oil for heating; and (b) electricity has come from renewable sources.

(AQW 8263/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): I can confirm the following;

(i)

Financial Years	Total Electricity Consumption Kwh	Total gas Consumption
April 2010 – March 2011	2,477,577 Kwh	2,933,487
April 2009 – March 2010	2,514,082 Kwh	2,960,379
April 2008 – March 2009	2,594,421 Kwh	3,060,699

- (ii) Parliament Buildings is part of the wider Stormont Estate contract for electricity procured by the Department of Finance and Personnel, DFP. Electricity is supplied to Parliament Buildings by Airtricity from 100% renewable sources such as offshore wind farms. Unfortunately the gas supplied to Parliament Buildings does not come from renewable sources at present.

I do hope that the above information provides the detail that you sought, however should you require any supplementary information I would be very happy to assist with your enquiry.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 2 March 2012

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Play and Leisure Policy

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Play and Leisure Policy. (AQW 7219/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The Play and Leisure Policy is being taken forward through an Implementation Plan which was published initially in March 2011.

To date we have engaged with fourteen councils to establish play and leisure strategic partnerships to ensure a joined-up approach to the planning and commissioning of play and leisure service and we are currently engaging with the other twelve councils. The Department has delivered seminars on risk-taking in play and on shaping communities to be play and child friendly, and invested in exemplar projects across council areas on new and innovative play areas.

Social Protection Fund: Fuel Poverty

Mr Durkan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister if they will extend the Social Protection Fund beyond one year to help mitigate the adverse impact on the most vulnerable should welfare reform proposals be implemented.

(AQW 7224/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: This year the Executive agreed to prioritise fuel poverty through the Social Protection Fund and agreed that the entire £20 million budget would contribute towards a Winter Fuel Poverty Payment Scheme, delivered through DSD and DHSSPS, under the Financial Assistance Act.

While funding for the programme was only secured for this financial year, the Budget document outlined our intention to seek additional money in years 2, 3 and 4 of this budget period from additional revenue streams identified by Executive Ministers that are coming into operation and delivering new resources for deployment.

After Schools Clubs: North Antrim

Mr Storey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many after schools clubs in the North Antrim area their Department has funded in each of the last three years; and the total amount allocated to each club.

(AQW 7323/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: From 1 April 2011, while work progresses to develop the Childcare Strategy, OFMDFM has provided interim funding to support the PlayBoard After School Childcare Project. The PlayBoard Project administers funding to 48 after school projects, including one in the North Antrim Constituency area. In 2011/12, Rasharkin Women's Group received a grant from PlayBoard £10,858.

In the two preceding years, DHSSPS administered funding to the PlayBoard After School Childcare Project.

Artwork: OFMDFM Inventory

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) to provide an inventory of the works of art currently held by their Department; and (ii) to detail the location of each work of art.

(AQW 7340/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: NICS artworks currently on loan to OFMDFM from DFP are detailed in this list below. This list also includes works of art held by some Arms Length Bodies for which we have responsibility.

Title	Location	Artist
Sunlight and Shadow	Stormont Castle	D Long
Belfast Lough from Co Antrim	Stormont Castle	J Turner
Mournes	Stormont Castle	J Hynes
Donegal	Stormont Castle	J Hynes
Upstream	Stormont Castle	R D Bottom
King George VI	Stormont Castle	W Conor
Going to the Races	Stormont Castle	W Conor
Crevinshaughey, Grey Morning	Stormont Castle	C Middleton
Irish Landscape	Stormont Castle	A Webb
Portaferry from Strangford	Stormont Castle	T Carr
Portbradden	Stormont Castle	C DeBurgh
Down the Lane	Stormont Castle	J Craig
Misty Light Horn Head	Stormont Castle	K Webb
The Yacht Club	Stormont Castle	C Dearden
Derry's Walls	Stormont Castle	J MacDonald
Flowers in Green Jar	Stormont Castle	B Ballard
Behind Open Doors	Stormont Castle	C Wilson
Reflections 2	Stormont Castle	S Aghajanian
Hayfield and Field, Cushendall	Stormont Castle	C McWilliams
Waiting Game	Stormont Castle	J Lawson
Daniel	Stormont Castle	J Vallely
Mourne Country 1	Stormont Castle	M Blair
Houses	Stormont Castle	M Robinson
House and Boats	Stormont Castle	M Robinson
Fishing Boats	Stormont Castle	N McCaig
Evening, Belfast Lough	Stormont Castle	N McCaig
Golf Links Antrim	Stormont Castle	J Turner

Title	Location	Artist
Glenelly Valley Sperrins	Stormont Castle	H Sloan
Port Bradden	Stormont Castle	S McLarnon
Trawlers at Low Tide	Stormont Castle	N McCaig
Hillsborough Lake	Stormont Castle	N McCaig
Garron Point, Antrim Coast	Stormont Castle	G Gillespie
Shipquay St, L'Derry	Stormont Castle	J Campbell
Still Life with Coffee Perculator	Stormont Castle	J O'Connell
View In Donegal	Stormont Castle	M Young
Antrim Coast Road	Stormont Castle	J Stanley Prossot
Annalong Harbour	Stormont Castle	W Conor
A Walk in the Mournes	Stormont Castle	A Nicholl
Whitepark Bay and Portbradden	Stormont Castle	D long
Country Man	Stormont Castle	M Sterling
Untitled	Stormont Castle	J McCorry
The Mournes	Stormont Castle	R Hewes
Green Field, Cavehill	Stormont Castle	C McWilliams
Green Wave	Stormont Castle	R Harvey
Coastal Scene	Stormont Castle	R Harvey
Still Life with Blue oil lamp	Stormont Castle	R J Croft
McCarroll's Bar	Stormont Castle	H McDonnell
Royal Portrush	Stormont Castle	D Mulholland
Red Chard	Stormont Castle	J McWilliams
Murlough in Spring	Stormont Castle	C Graham
Parting 2	Stormont Castle	H McIlfatrick
Parting 1	Stormont Castle	H McIlfatrick
The Wild North 2	Stormont Castle	H McIlfatrick
Soft Day -Sea Shore	Stormont Castle	J Duncan
Yellow	Stormont Castle	J Kelly
Small Holding	Stormont Castle	J Kelly
Keem, Achill	Stormont Castle	G McCandless
CS Lewis	Stormont Castle	R Wilson
Flight of Birds	Stormont Castle	J Behan
T18 The Family	Stormont Castle	R Downey
Still Waters Run Deep	Stormont Castle	G McKnight

Title	Location	Artist
The History Man Explains	Stormont Castle	G Gingles
Digory Kirk, CS Lewis	Stormont Castle	R Wilson
Trassey Bridge	Parliament Buildings	D J McDowell
River at Glynn	Parliament Buildings	T Stephenson
Children on Beach, Newcastle	Parliament Buildings	T Kerr
Whiterocks, Co Antrim	Parliament Buildings	D Long
Mountains and Lakes	Parliament Buildings	T McElnea
Near Ballymena	Parliament Buildings	L Nesbitt
Lake Connemara	Parliament Buildings	G Gillespie
Cushendall	Parliament Buildings	J Turner
Whitepark Bay and Portbradden	Parliament Buildings	R Hill
Fair, Co Galway	Parliament Buildings	A McKenna
Along the Antrim Coast	Parliament Buildings	P Knuttel
Untitled	Parliament Buildings	T P Flanagan
Clougher	Parliament Buildings	B Allen
Substance and Shadow	Parliament Buildings	L Turner
Memory Lane	Parliament Buildings	J Patton
Thoor Ballylee, Co Galway	Parliament Buildings	C Lucas
Blarney Castle	Parliament Buildings	C Lucas
Classibawn, Co Sligo	Parliament Buildings	S Langham
Cliffs	Parliament Buildings	P Watson
Curragh Men	Parliament Buildings	H Sloan
Palm House Raining	Parliament Buildings	S McWilliams
Anchored in the Past	Parliament Buildings	A Gardner
The River Lagan Belfast	Washington, USA	G Morrison
Mournes at Annalong	Washington, USA	JS Haggan
The Opera House Belfast	Washington, USA	J Crabtree
Thompson Memorial Fountain	Washington, USA	B Allen
Anderson and McAuley	Washington, USA	B Allen
Untitled	Washington, USA	D Munroe
When Day is Done Lough Neagh	Washington, USA	N J McCaig
Coast Road Near Glenarm Co. Antrim	Washington, USA	R Hill
Strangford	Washington, USA	L Boal
Blue House in Snow	Washington, USA	P Cunningham

Title	Location	Artist
The Hedges of my Youth Beneath Cavehill	Washington, USA	D Kelly
Tin Whistler	Brussels	Vallely
Breffey Series	Castle Buildings	T P Flanagan
Rockpool	Castle Buildings	T Carr OBE
Ballycastle Head	Castle Buildings	D Ferran
Near Dungloe	Castle Buildings	P McCoy
Port II	Castle Buildings	S McClean
The Lough Foyle	Castle Buildings	D Ferran
Forest Stream Tollymore	Castle Buildings	D Mulholland
Irish Cottage	Castle Buildings	D Mulholland
Donaghadee	Castle Buildings	R J Croft
Linen Hall Library	Castle Buildings	Michael D
Spot the Dog	Armagh	R Wilson
The Bann at Portadown	Armagh	T McElnea
Lurgan Station	Armagh	P Stothers
Tree of Life	Armagh	O Henry
Flowers on a Red Table	Armagh	N Shawcross
Red Cow	Armagh	S McWilliams
The Boats	Armagh	O Henry
The Builder	Armagh	S McWilliams
Figure on Ground 2	Armagh	D Crone
Figure on Ground 1	Armagh	D Crone
On the Way Home	Armagh	K Wilson
The Kitchen Dresser	Armagh	R Davidson
Plants 2008	Armagh	D Crone
Hum Dream	Armagh	P Doherty
She Thought She Was Alone	Armagh	R McGurran
Washed Away	Armagh	R McGuigan
Fish Market, Portadown	Annex B Dundonald House	R D Beattie
Saturday Shopping, Portadown	Annex B Dundonald House	R D Beattie
Market Day Portadown 1898	Annex B Dundonald House	R D Beattie
Rock Formation 3	Annex B Dundonald House	M Thompson
Rock Formation 4	Annex B Dundonald House	M Thompson

Title	Location	Artist
Along the Coast	Annex B Dundonald House	C McAleer
Still Life	Annex B Dundonald House	R Wilson
Capall Glass	Annex B Dundonald House	R Watton
Capall Ruada	Annex B Dundonald House	R Watton
Dallways Bawn	Annex B Dundonald House	L McWha
The Roses	Annex B Dundonald House	J Crooks
Celtic Angel 3	Annex B Dundonald House	R Wilson
Celtic Angel 2	Annex B Dundonald House	R Wilson
Over Moorland to Black	Annex B Dundonald House	S Magee
Lily and Tall Tree Vase 1	Annex B Dundonald House	J McCart
Tulips and Fireplace	Annex B Dundonald House	J McCart
Lily and Tall Tree Vase 2	Annex B Dundonald House	J McCart
Night Garden 3	Annex B Dundonald House	A-M Keaveney
Teaset, Incomplete	Annex B Dundonald House	L Turner
Two Trees	Annex B Dundonald House	D Crone
Man Leaving	Annex B Dundonald House	M Gale
Gold and Ochre Shore	Annex B Dundonald House	C Lynch
Stormy Hillside	Annex B Dundonald House	J Conway
Smithfield Market	Park House, Belfast	R J Beattie
Winter Evening on the River Lagan	Park House, Belfast	F W Hull
Working in the Bog, Achill	Park House, Belfast	A McKenna

Community Relations Programme: Funding

Mr Spratt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the level of funding, made available through the District Council Community Relations Programme, allocated to each council area, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 7604/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The following table details the level of funding provided to each district council in each of the last three years.

Council	2008/09 £	2009/10 £	2010/11 £	3-Year Total £
Antrim	46,051	42,157	51,089	139,297
Ards	91,297	89,963	106,643	287,903
Armagh	87,990	92,390	121,867	302,247
Ballymena	71,730	81,828	92,414	245,972
Ballymoney	78,819	59,096	72,532	210,447

Council	2008/09 £	2009/10 £	2010/11 £	3-Year Total £
Banbridge	98,986	103,667	108,048	310,701
Belfast	451,614	477,708	586,348	1,515,670
Carrickfergus	49,498	52,754	64,974	167,226
Castlereagh	54,717	59,684	47,270	161,671
Coleraine	76,240	83,861	90,033	250,134
Cookstown	55,028	75,833	78,286	209,147
Craigavon	54,782	109,345	116,656	280,783
Derry City Council	239,291	318,520	323,523	881,334
Down	91,901	96,357	112,149	300,407
Dungannon And South Tyrone	100,797	127,670	134,514	362,981
Fermanagh	85,361	100,431	99,144	284,936
Larne	54,647	57,380	55,158	167,185
Limavady	64,923	68,840	80,873	214,636
Lisburn	50,258	50,834	62,686	163,778
Magherafelt	60,564	79,930	87,759	228,253
Moyle	49,665	48,986	36,694	135,345
Newry And Mourne	130,187	132,816	158,140	421,143
Newtownabbey	71,111	71,285	100,067	242,463
North Down	49,833	57,180	61,744	168,757
Omagh	52,273	50,589	60,203	163,065
Strabane	89,126	105,067	111,005	305,198
Total	2,406,689	2,694,171	3,019,819	8,120,679

Irish language: Promotion

Mr McKay asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action their Department is taking to promote a better understanding of the Irish language and to address any intolerance and prejudice against the language and those who speak it.

(AQW 7869/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We provide representation to an Interdepartmental Charter Implementation Group (ICIG) chaired by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. The ICIG is responsible for co-ordinating work to implement, monitor and report on the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

Our department complies with the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in respect of the Irish Language and Ulster Scots. We subscribe to the Guidance and Codes of Courtesy for Irish and Ulster Scots developed to assist staff in applying the principles of the Charter

In addition, we published a number of documents in Irish. These include the “Super Six” comic for primary school children on the subject of bullying and the North South Ministerial Council Joint Secretariat Joint Communiqués for the Council’s Plenary and Language Sectoral meetings.

Hospitality: Spend

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 6358/11-15, whether the figures provided include their Department’s arm’s-length bodies; and if not, to provide this information for each of the last five years.

(AQW 7894/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The figures provided in response to AQW 6358/11-15 did not include hospitality costs for OFMDFM’s arms-length bodies.

The following table sets out the total spend on hospitality by each of the arms-length bodies of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in each of the last five financial years:

Arms Length Body	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
The Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland	£12,254	£16,534	£12,459	£13,726	£3,798
Equality Commission for Northern Ireland	£1,013	£Nil	£Nil	£488	£193
Community Relations Council for Northern Ireland	£10,101	£9,970	£8,725	£6,282	£9,351
Strategic Investment Board	£11,704	£19,574	£5,838	£5,091	£6,108
Ilex Urban Regeneration Company	£2,715	£7,334	£3,652	£8,517	£6,579
The Commissioner for Children and Young People for Northern Ireland	£6,463	£5,107	£3,520	£3,302	£1,062
The Commissioner for Victims and Survivors for Northern Ireland	N/A	N/A	£416	£1,809	£1,492
The Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	£1,385
The Northern Ireland Memorial Fund	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	£369

Ebrington Barracks: Opening Costs

Mr P Ramsey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide a breakdown of the cost of the opening of the regenerated Ebrington Barracks, Foyle.

(AQW 7923/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: A breakdown of the cost of the opening of the regenerated Ebrington Barracks is provided below:

Service	Cost (£)	VAT @ 20%	Total (£)
Project Management	16,666.67	3,333.33	20,000.00
Welcome Reception	750.00	150.00	900.00

Service	Cost (£)	VAT @ 20%	Total (£)
Welcome tea / coffee for public	3,000.00	600.00	3,600.00
Site preparation / event dressing	5,000.00	1,000.00	6,000.00
Design and Print	7,000.00	1,400.00	8,400.00
Temporary Structures	4,000.00	800.00	4,800.00
Production Equipment	16,000.00	3,200.00	19,200.00
Creative Design and Execution	25,000.00	5,000.00	30,000.00
Performers	12,150.00	2,430.00	14,580.00
Photographer	240.00	48.00	288.00
Security	9,000.00	1,800.00	10,800.00
Health and Safety Management	5,000.00	1,000.00	6,000.00
Site Services	8,000.00	1,600.00	9,600.00
Marketing	2,200.00	440.00	2,640.00
Event Management	7,500.00	1,500.00	9,000.00
On-site Contingency	2,000.00	400.00	2,400.00
Sub Total			148,208.00
December Cunningham Sq. Event			900.00
Total			149,108.00

Ilex: Contracts Awarded

Mr P Ramsey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many businesses, based in Foyle, have been awarded contracts by Ilex in each of the last three years.

(AQW 7924/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: In each of the last three financial years Ilex has awarded the following number of contracts to businesses based in the Foyle constituency:

2008/09	52 contracts
2009/10	91 contracts
2010/11	106 contracts
2011/12 (year to date)	105 contracts

Ebrington Barracks: Provision of Services

Mr P Ramsey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many Derry based companies will be providing services for the opening of the Ebrington Barracks site, Foyle, including details of the services and the cost.

(AQW 7927/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Ilex is keen to ensure that local organisations are given every opportunity to tender for goods and services. Within the Terms of Reference for the procurement of the Event Management of the Parade Ground Opening contract, there was a requirement that the successful company had to source as many goods and services locally as possible. As a result, almost

70% of the goods and services for the opening event are being provided by local organisations, which equates to over £96,000 to the local economy.

Trade Missions: Objectives

Mr Moutray asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline their Department's objectives in relation to any forthcoming trade missions during 2012.

(AQW 7986/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Growing the economy and tackling disadvantage are at the heart of our Programme for Government. Attracting and maintaining high quality foreign economic investors is a key component in this work.

The United States offers a very good example of why our involvement in trade missions is such an important aspect of our work. Approximately 14,000 people are employed by US-owned companies. Our visits to the US over recent years have played a vital part in securing a wide range of investments. We have built up important personal relationships with senior executives in a range of companies that are providing significant numbers of jobs here, including NYSE, Chicago Mercantile Exchange, Citi, HBO and Universal Studios.

We visited the NYSE's Belfast operation on 17 February 2012 to meet its Global CEO Duncan Niederauer. Three hundred people are employed in the heart of Belfast and Mr Niederauer reaffirmed the positive working relationship with us and his company's ongoing commitment to Belfast.

We also met with the Vice Premier of China at an official dinner in Dublin Castle on Sunday 19 February. This is a very important relationship we will want to develop further in the coming months and years, so it is vital we continue this important work, building relationships and delivering jobs.

Next month we will travel to the US and Canada over St Patrick's Day, when we will continue to promote our economic strategy at the highest levels of the Obama Administration. We plan to meet Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper to build on our strong historical, cultural and economic links.

Our activities are not restricted to North America. We also have plans to travel to the economic powerhouses of India and the United Arab Emirates in April. We will meet with existing and potential investors to build trade links and to help local firms develop their export markets. We are also actively considering a visit to China later in the year.

Working closely with other departments, we are acutely conscious of the importance of putting our economy on the global stage. We plan to do all in our power to harness all opportunities.

Commissioner for Public Appointments: Remit

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they (i) have considered extending the powers of the Commissioner for Public Appointments to include the staff and board members of Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships; and (ii) will ask the Commissioner for Public Appointments to ensure that the staff and board members of Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships are required to complete political activity forms, which is the practice for other public boards.

(AQW 8026/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The statutory remit of the Commissioner for Public Bodies covers Ministerial appointments to the Boards of public bodies. As Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships are not public bodies they sit outside the Commissioner's remit.

The appointment of staff to public bodies also falls outside the Commissioner's remit.

Ballykelly Army Base: Costs

Mr Campbell asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 7435/11 -15, to provide an estimate of the annual on-going overheads at the former Ballykelly Army Base, broken down by (i) security; (ii) utilities; (iii) maintenance; and (iv) all other associated costs.

(AQW 8222/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: As OFMDFM acquired the site on 7 October 2011 and does not have a full breakdown of previous costs from MOD, the following costs are an estimate based on experience to date and known commitments. They may change as management of the site develops and further experience is gained.

Security	£250,000
Utilities	£120,000
Maintenance	£100,000
Other costs	£68,000
Total	£538,000

Asylum Seekers and Refugees: Security Clearance

Mr D McIlveen asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what discussions they have had with the UK Border Agency in relation to the security clearance issues faced by asylum seekers and refugees who are trying to secure employment, but whose home countries will not supply the necessary paperwork, such as proof of address.

(AQW 8341/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We have not had any discussions with UK Border Agency (UKBA) in relation to this matter. However, as you will be aware, this issue was discussed at the most recent All Party Group on Ethnic Minority Communities meeting.

We have asked officials to discuss and explore this issue further with UKBA and other parties involved and to write to you about the results of their discussions in due course.

Capital Realisations: Money Generated

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) how much money was generated in capital realisations by 2011; (ii) what high level projects this encompassed; and (iii) how much money was generated in each project.

(AQW 8406/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM has generated £4.64 million in capital realisations by selling the former army barracks at Malone Road Belfast and Magherafelt. The money generated in each project was £3.77 million for Malone Road and £870k for Magherafelt.

Race Relations (NI) Order 1997

Mr D McIlveen asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they will introduce legislation to rectify the deficiencies of the Race Relations (NI) Order 1997.

(AQW 8535/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We are committed to developing a Racial Equality Strategy and, through a public consultation on the Strategy, will be seeking views on how best to ensure a society where racism in any of its forms is not tolerated and where we live together as a society and enjoy equality of opportunity and equal protection. This may include the consideration of legislative options.

In the shorter term however, we will be bringing forward legislation, in order to meet EU obligations, to amend the Race Relations Order to prescribe the circumstances in which unlawful discrimination in relation to employment under that Order applies to seafarers on ships and hovercraft.

Flexible Working/Affordable Childcare: Danish Model

Mr D McIlveen asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what consideration their Department has given to the Danish model of flexible working conditions and affordable childcare to increase the level of female employees.

(AQW 8669/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: In developing the strategy for integrated, accessible and affordable childcare, OFMDFM will consider other successful systems of childcare and labour market interventions. The policy and options appraisal of childcare provision recently published by OFMDFM includes a benchmarking analysis of systems across four jurisdictions, of which one was Denmark.

Historical Institutional Abuse Taskforce: Update

Mr A Maskey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the work of the Historical Institutional Abuse Taskforce.

(AQO 1363/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The report and recommendations of the Taskforce were considered by the Executive last July.

Following a period of further information gathering, headed by Junior Minister Bell and Junior Minister Anderson over the summer recess, we announced the Executive's decision to establish an inquiry and investigation into historical institutional abuse.

As we reported to the Assembly last month, we have started to prepare the legislation that will give the inquiry panel the necessary powers to compel people and documents.

Work is underway to establish an acknowledgement forum, through which victims and survivors will have the opportunity to recount their individual experiences to the inquiry, within a sensitive and confidential environment. We will shortly be appointing the members to the panel.

The inquiry will have premises in Belfast City Centre and in Derry.

We are also committed to establishing an advocacy service that will provide support to victims and survivors before, during and after the inquiry. We have arranged for interim support to be provided to victims and survivors, whilst this service is established, through Lifeline, which can be contacted on 0808 808 8000. Further information on support available to victims and survivors is detailed on the NI Direct website.

We intend that the inquiry and investigation will conclude within two and a half years of its commencement. The chairperson will then be required to provide a report to the Executive within six months.

We are considering potential candidates for the inquiry panel, acknowledgement forum and inquiry secretariat.

Budget Review Group: Update

Mr Ó hÓisín asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Budget Review Group.
(AQO 1367/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: During this Assembly term, the Budget Review Group has met three times. At its most recent meeting on 31 January, it agreed a future work programme to meet on a quarterly basis to report and review progress on key priorities. The next meeting is scheduled for 1 March. The priorities identified by the Group are considered to have the greatest potential and most strategic significance during the current Budget period. They typically include alternative options for

accessing finance, such as European funding; realising the value of surplus and under-utilised assets; and examining the potential for generating efficiencies through, for example, the ongoing review of arms length bodies. Specific pieces of work have been commissioned on each of the priority areas and progress on a number of these will be reported at the next meeting. Recommendations will be made to the Executive on the full range of issues in due course.

Social Investment Fund: Implementation Process

Mr Dunne asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the implementation process for the Social Investment Fund.

(AQO 1368/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Public consultation on the implementation of the Social Investment Fund ended on 23 December 2011. During the consultation period, six public events were held with some 250 people attending. We also received over 300 responses via the consultation questionnaire.

We are currently considering all responses and feedback. We hope to be in a position to publish a consultation report in the coming weeks. In parallel, we will develop and bring final proposals to the Executive, with a view to having the Fund fully operational as soon as possible.

Social Investment Fund: Update

Mr McQuillan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Social Investment Fund.

(AQO 1369/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Public consultation on the implementation of the Social Investment Fund ended on 23 December 2011. During the consultation period, 6 public events were held with some 250 people attending. We also received over 300 responses via the consultation questionnaire.

We are currently considering all responses and feedback. We hope to be in a position to publish a consultation report in the coming weeks. In parallel, we will develop and bring final proposals to the Executive, with a view to having the Fund fully operational as soon as possible.

Funding Allocations: Ministerial Approval

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the extent of the funding which has been allocated by their Department, without evidence of Ministerial approval, over the last two years.

(AQO 1370/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Departmental Accounting Officer commissioned Internal Audit to review sponsor control of the Departments directly funded bodies for 2010/11. This report highlighted eight cases where funding was allocated prior to Ministerial approval being given.

Procedures have now been put in place to ensure that Ministerial approval is obtained before letters of offer are made in all cases. A follow-up exercise on the 2010/11 report will provide evidence of compliance with the new procedures in 2011/12.

Shackleton Barracks, Ballykelly: Update

Mr G Robinson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the future of the former Shackleton Barracks, Ballykelly.

(AQO 1371/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Consideration is being given to the future of Shackleton Barracks in the short, medium and long term, with a number of options being explored which could generate monetary or social benefit pending disposal of the site.

Investigations are also being carried out on the hydrological and contamination aspects of the site to ensure that it is being responsibly managed and that any proposed use does not create health and safety risks.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Recruitment Agencies: DARD Spend

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the amount paid to recruitment agencies for (i) full-time; and (ii) part-time posts in her Department, and its arm's-length bodies, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 7741/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): The total amount paid to recruitment agencies by my Department and its arms-length bodies in each of the last three financial years is provided on the attached Annex. The expenditure by arms-length bodies includes a substantial proportion in respect of seasonal workers required annually by the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute. A breakdown between full-time and part-time posts is not available.

Pig Producers: Export Opportunities

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how her Department intends to grow the export opportunities for producers of pedigree pig stock whilst offering assistance with exorbitant transport and veterinary inspection costs.

(AQW 7992/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am supportive of all opportunities to grow exports of pedigree pig stock. As a measure of this support, my officials in Trade Branch provide export health certificates, veterinary support certificates, notes for guidance and advice to potential exporters. This documentation and supporting information is provided at no cost to the exporter. In addition, my officials provide training to private veterinarians who facilitate these live exports as part of their rural business. Again this training is currently provided free of charge by officials within my Department.

My officials have also been working closely with the industry over a number of years to control Aujeszky's disease (AD). As I am sure you are aware that work allowed us to have our eradication programme formally recognised by the EU in 2009. Since that time my officials and the industry have continued to work together and as a result DARD will submit an application to the EU to be formally recognised as AD free at the same time as the south of Ireland. When we do gain disease free status that will open up new trade opportunities for pig keepers.

The issue of transport and veterinary costs is a commercial matter between the exporter and the private sector who carry out these activities as part of their business.

'Agri-Food: A Study for Cross-Border Co-Operation'

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she will recommend that the Food Strategy Board considers the adoption of the recommendations in InterTradeIreland's 'Agri-Food: A Study for Cross-Border Co-operation'.

(AQW 8045/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The role of the Agri-Food Strategy Board (AFSB) will be to develop the current Focus on Food document into a longer strategic vision for the sector.

In doing so I have no doubt that the AFSB will explore all avenues that can assist the local sector to grow and secure new markets. I am sure that InterTrade Ireland's Agri-food study will be one of a range of source materials that the Board will consider in developing the way forward for the industry.

The InterTrade Ireland Report identifies initiatives within strategic themes similar to those outlined in Focus on Food and both documents recognise the importance of industry involvement in policy development.

Whilst the industry in the South remains a competitor for our industry, we also share many of the same challenges and opportunities. The new AFSB will no doubt explore if there are areas that might benefit from a cross border approach and the InterTrade Ireland report will be a very helpful document in that regard.

Agrifood Sector: Development

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has sent all reports and relevant information on the agri-food sector to her Department so that the sector can be developed and achieve increased competitiveness.

(AQW 8080/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My officials have a strong working relationship with their DETI and Invest NI counterparts, particularly in relation to the agri-food sector. We worked together previously on a partnership strategy for the agri-food sector – Focus on Food.

This close working relationship will continue through the new Agri-Food Strategy Board (AFSB), which will have representation from the appropriate Departments and agencies alongside industry members under the independent Chairmanship of Tony O'Neill. The AFSB will be tasked with developing a longer term strategy for the sector moving forward. This will no doubt involve the continued exchange of relevant reports and other information to ensure a coordinated approach to supporting this important sector.

Fuel: DARD Spend

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much her Department, and its agencies, have spent on fuel in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8093/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The expenditure incurred is as follows:

	2006/07 £	2007/08 £	2008/09 £	2009/10 £	2010/11 £
Core Department	87,392	81,508	117,899	110,426	159,963
Forest Service	258,102	282,333	338,140	280,670	316,532
Rivers Agency	429,814	411,713	555,465	491,829	591,087
Total	775,308	775,554	1,011,504	882,925	1,067,582

Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises: DARD Spend

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much her Department has spent on conferences, away-days and team building exercises in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8099/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The spend is as follows:

	2009/10 £	2010/11 £	2011/12 (to Jan 2012) £
Conferences	56,064	35,879	26,136
Away-days	5,559	8,859	2,019

	2009/10 £	2010/11 £	2011/12 (to Jan 2012) £
Team Building	936	2,137	1,968
Total	62,559	46,875	30,123

Horse Mussel Reefs: Infraction Fines

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she is taking to ensure that European Commission infraction fines are not levied on her Department in relation to the Strangford Lough Horse Mussel reefs matter.

(AQW 8134/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Officials in my Department have worked closely with those in the Department of the Environment to co-fund the three year Modiolus Restoration Research Project which concluded in the summer of 2011. Both Departments have examined the recommendations in the project report and prepared draft proposals which the Commission are currently examining. At this stage we await the response of the Commission which we will carefully consider before commenting on future actions.

Horse Mussels Reefs: Management

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she will create a taskforce, in conjunction with the Department of the Environment, to manage the habitat of horse mussels in Strangford Lough.

(AQW 8135/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Officials from the Department of the Environment and my Department have been working together on this issue for some time, co-funding the three year Modiolus Restoration Research Project and building on the report recommendations. Each Department brought their respective responsibilities to a draft proposal prepared recently for the Commission. We await the Commission response to this proposal and will continue work together and keep implementation arrangements under review to deliver future requirements.

Dogs (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether the Dogs (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 applies to hunt clubs and the ability of their handlers to exercise control of their dogs.

(AQW 8164/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011 ("the 2011 Act") amends the Dogs Order 1983 ("the 1983 Order") which provides for licensing of dogs and offences in relation to straying, attacking livestock and certain other pets as well as enforcement of dog control legislation by Council dog wardens.

In general terms, the provisions of the 1983 Order, as amended, apply to all dogs and their owners unless specifically stated otherwise. However, there are some provisions which are only applicable to dogs held under a dog licence and others which are only applicable to dogs held under a block licence. There are also provisions which exempt certain types of dogs from specific aspects. For example, Article 5 of the 1983 Order exempts assistance dogs and police dogs from the licensing provisions. In light of this, each provision of the 1983 Order would have to be considered individually in order to confirm whether or not it applies to particular dogs in a particular situation.

The only Article in which hunt packs are specifically referred to as being exempt from a provision is Article 25. Article 25(1) makes it an offence for a dog to be off the lead on certain lands e.g. land on which livestock are present. However, paragraph (2) then goes on to exempt some dogs including police dogs, sheepdogs and dogs being used in a pack of hounds. This means that keepers of those dogs

would not be committing an offence if they allow their dog to go on to the particular land without the dog being on a lead. This exemption is necessary in that it would be impractical to expect police dogs on police business, sheep dogs tending sheep or a whole pack of hounds on a hunt to be put on a lead as this would interfere with the very purpose of the dog.

Rural Payment Agency: Tendering Process

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) why the work, which was previously carried out by the Rural Payment Agency, has been put out to tender; (ii) what is the estimated cost of transferring the responsibilities for this work, including the software used, from the Rural Payment Agency; and (iii) whether Rural Payment Agency staff have been, or will be, redeployed.
(AQW 8180/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am not responsible for the work of the Rural Payments Agency (RPA), which is responsible for direct payments to farmers in England.

While my Department is the Paying Agency for the north of Ireland and performs many similar functions to the RPA, it is not involved in the RPA's tendering processes.

Livestock Theft: Identification Tags

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the potential for stolen livestock entering the food chain with different identification tags; and what action her Department is taking to address this issue.
(AQW 8200/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: DARD have responsibility for the authorisation of livestock identification and registered keepers may only obtain tags from authorised suppliers. Food business operators at slaughterhouses have a responsibility to check the identify and description of animals presented for slaughter against data held within the APHIS system. My officials supervise this process in meat plants, on behalf of the Food Standards Agency (FSA), to ensure that only animals fit for human consumption enter the food-chain. This process is regularly audited by both the FSA and external auditors from the EU and third countries.

Stolen livestock is a matter for the PSNI with whom my officials within the VS Central Enforcement team cooperate closely. If anyone has any information on stolen livestock, I would ask that they provide this information to the PSNI at the earliest possible opportunity.

Livestock Theft: Phantom Identification Tags

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the prevalence of phantom identification tags that are in circulation which could be used on stolen livestock; and what action her Department is taking to address this issue.
(AQW 8202/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: DARD have a process in place, for the authorisation of ear-tag suppliers, to order tags on behalf of named clients. Clients must write to the supplier confirming their authority to access his data via the APHIS Portal. All tags must be registered before use & can only be obtained from an authorised supplier. Any tag number that is registered as dead, slaughtered, exported or lost is marked as such on the APHIS system and cannot be reactivated unless in very exceptional circumstances and after detailed investigation of the provenance of the animal. Animals may not move from the farm of origin into a market, meat plant or export assembly centre without validation of their identity against the presenters herd list. Furthermore, in the north, the validity of the animal identification is subject to an extremely high level of checking, not only through cattle and sheep identity inspections, but also at every TB and Brucellosis test.

Badger Vaccination Trials and Studies

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how her Department is monitoring badger vaccination trials and studies in England and the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 8231/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My officials are monitoring closely the badger vaccination trials and studies in England and in the south of Ireland.

DARD officials formally meet twice-yearly with their counterparts from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) in the south of Ireland at North-South TB and Brucellosis Working Group meetings. Additional joint Sub-Group meetings take place to discuss opportunities for collaborative TB research and studies.

A recent output of these discussions is the agreement to jointly organise an international vaccination experts' scientific workshop pre-summer 2012 to consider badger vaccination issues on the island of Ireland.

DARD officials also participate in monthly TB Liaison Group meetings led by the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), which include representatives from England, Scotland and Wales as well as from the north of Ireland. These meetings provide an opportunity to discuss relevant TB issues, including updates relating to badger vaccination trials and studies.

In addition, DARD officials attend, as observers, the Defra-led Vaccines Programme Advisory Group, where TB vaccine development in both badgers and cattle are discussed. Further monitoring of badger vaccination research is conducted through the Defra-led Epidemiology and Wildlife Risks Programme Advisory Group. Both these groups are cognisant of the international developments in this field.

Key experts in the field of badger vaccination from England and the south of Ireland have delivered presentations on their badger vaccination trials and studies to relevant DARD staff.

Dog Attacks: Livestock

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) how many dog attacks which resulted in (a) the loss of livestock; and (b) serious injury to livestock, have been reported by farmers in each of the last five years; and (ii) how many dog owners have been prosecuted in relation to these incidents.

(AQW 8358/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Dog control here is legislated for by the Dogs Order 1983, as amended by the Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011. The local Councils enforce this legislation and provide statistics to my Department regarding its operation.

The table below details the number of investigations of dog attacks on livestock and the number of prosecutions that resulted from these investigations for each of the past 5 years. My Department does not hold information regarding the severity of the attacks.

Year	Number of Livestock Attacks Investigated	Number of Prosecutions
2007	330	7
2008	412	5
2009	291	11
2010	466	1
2011	386	7

EU Funding: Amount Surrendered

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what EU funding has been surrendered by her Department in each of the last two financial years.

(AQW 8363/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has not surrendered any EU funds in each of the last 2 financial years.

EU expenditure is matched by EU funding and the process for adjusting requirements is by internal reallocations in the in-year monitoring rounds. This means that where there is a decrease in EU expenditure there is an equal and opposite decrease in EU funds (income), and the budget changes net to zero. As a consequence, EU funds are not "surrendered" or declared as reduced requirements.

ANNEX A

TABLE 1: OPENING BUDGET, FINAL BUDGET AND PROVISIONAL OUTTURN 2009/10 AND 2010/11

	£'000					
	2009/10			2010/11		
EU Schemes - Receipts	Opening Budget	Final Budget (Feb Monitoring)	Provisional Outturn	Opening Budget	Final Budget (Feb Monitoring)	Provisional Outturn
METS	0	0	0	0	-1,250	0
Fisheries e-log books	0	0	0	0	-200	0
Agri Food Waste Challenge	-1,000	0	0	-1,500	-300	-26
EU Fisheries	-2,041	0	0	0	0	0
European Fisheries Fund	-1,000	-300	-123	-2,075	-1,497	-1,019
Interreg (Resource)	-150	0	0	0	-19	0
Interreg (Capital Grant)	-150	0	0	-375	0	0
CAP Schemes	-255,651	-307,645	-306,648	-256,635	-280,619	-279,336
NIRDP	-12,280	-28,268	-23,214	-13,690	-30,804	-25,532
Total	-272,272	-336,213	-329,985	-274,275	-314,689	-305,913

	£'000					
	2009/10			2010/11		
EU Schemes - Expenditure	Opening Budget	Final Budget (Feb Monitoring)	Provisional Outturn	Opening Budget	Final Budget (Feb Monitoring)	Provisional Outturn
METS	0	0	0	0	1,250	0

	£'000					
EU Schemes - Expenditure	2009/10			2010/11		
	Opening Budget	Final Budget (Feb Monitoring)	Provisional Outturn	Opening Budget	Final Budget (Feb Monitoring)	Provisional Outturn
Fisheries e-log books	0	0	0	0	200	0
Agri Food Waste Challenge	1,000	0	0	1,500	300	26
EU Fisheries	2,041	0	0	0	0	0
European Fisheries Fund	1,000	300	123	2,075	1,497	1,019
Interreg (Resource)	150	0	0	0	19	0
Interreg (Capital Grant)	150	0	0	375	0	0
CAP Schemes	255,651	307,645	306,648	256,635	280,619	279,336
NIRDP	12,280	28,268	23,214	13,690	30,804	25,532
Total	272,272	336,213	329,985	274,275	314,689	305,913

Rural Community Development Services

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 6006/11-15, when the invitation to tender for the provision of support services for Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist rural communities will be issued.

(AQW 8367/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: An Economic Appraisal on the provision of local rural community development services which includes specific proposals for services for protestant/unionist/loyalist rural communities has been approved by the Department of Finance and Personnel. Invitations to tender have been issued in February 2012 with the aim of having contracts in place by April 2012.

Sperrin House, Omagh: Lease

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) when the lease on Sperrin House, Omagh, is due to end; (ii) the annual cost of the lease to her Department; (iii) how much her Department intends to spend on upgrading the House; (iv) what works are proposed; and (v) when work is due to commence.

(AQW 8410/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) is bound to a lease on Sperrin House until 31 January 2015. DFP manage the office estate and notionally charge Departments for the occupancy of the building, therefore there is no annual lease cost to DARD. The notional costs to DARD for Sperrin House are approximately £243,000 per year.

Sperrin House has 4 storeys, comprising of mainly small cellular offices. We intend to create open plan layouts where possible, allowing DARD to make better use of the available space and create additional

capacity, in line with current workplace planning. DFP estimate the work will cost £270,000. Work began on 10th February and is due to complete in April this year.

Forestry Service: Leases

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to list (i) the organisations which lease property or land from the Forestry Service; (ii) the locations of the property or land; and (iii) the time remaining on these leases.

(AQW 8461/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The table below provides the information requested in respect of Forest Service leases with organisations:-

(I) Organisation	(ii) Location	(iii) Time Remaining On Lease
Land & Buildings		
Cloverly Hall Ltd.	Castlewellan Forest Park	12 yrs 4 mths
Speedwell Trust	Parkanaur Forest	9 yrs 4 mths
Antrim Borough Council	Randalstown Forest	11 yrs 11 mths
Workspace Ltd	Derrynoyd Forest	82 years
The Girl Guides Association	Gosford Forest Park	9yrs 10 mths
Scout Association Trust Corporation	Parkanaur Forest	1 yr 5 mths
Rathcoole Self Help Group	Breen Forest	9 yrs 8 mths
Clanrye Employment & and Training Services	Slieve Gullion Forest Park	7 yrs 2 mths
Heart Revolving Fund	Gosford Forest Park	183yrs 2mths
Restore Ireland Ltd.	Gosford Forest Park	89 yrs 9 mths
Slieve Gullion Courtyard Development Group Ltd.	Slieve Gullion Forest Park	84 yrs 3 mths
Buildings Only		
RSPB	Belvoir Park Forest	6yrs
Highpoint	Castlewellan Forest Park	17 yrs 3 mths
Land Only		
Arqiva	Donard Forest	60 yrs 5 mths
Arqiva	Derrynoyd Forest	12 yrs 10 mths
Arqiva	Kesh Forest	19 yrs 10 mths
Arqiva	Camlough Forest	3 yrs 5 mths
Arqiva	Rostrevor Forest	66 yrs 6 mths
Arqiva	Grange Park Forest	57 yrs 2 mths
Arqiva	Glenariff Forest Park	13 yrs 8 mths
Arqiva	Ballypatrick Forest	13 yrs 8 mths
NIE	Tardree Forest	3 yrs 4 mths

(I) Organisation	(II) Location	(III) Time Remaining On Lease
NIE	Loughmore Forest	5 yrs 5 mths
NIE	Grange Park Forest	8 yrs
Orange Personal Communications Services Ltd.	Gortin Glen Forest	11 yrs 6 mths
Patterson Electronics	Springwell Forest	6 months
PSNI	Slieveanorra Forest	62 yrs 1 mth
PSNI	The Fews Forest	62 yrs 1 mth
PSNI	Gortin Glen Forest	62 yrs 1 mth
PSNI	Lough Navar Forest	62 yrs 1 mth
PSNI	Grange Park Forest	62 yrs 1 mth
PSNI	Dunmoyle Forest	14 yrs 10 mths
PSNI	Carnmore Forest	14 yrs 10 mths
PSNI	Goles Forest	18 yrs 1 mth
PSNI	Slieve Gullion For. Pk	14yrs 4mths
Derry City Council	Learmount Forest	21 yrs 10 mths
Down District Council	Tollymore Forest Park	16 yrs 10 mths
Banbridge District Council	Castlewellan Forest Park	16 yrs 7 mths
Larne Bor. Council	Ballyboley Forest	13yrs 1 mth
Rossigh Angling Club	C'Archdale Forest	1yr 4mths
Ministry of Defence	Ballypatrick Forest	19 years
Defence Estates	Slieveanorra Forest	8 months
Defence Estates	Ballypatrick Forest	4 yrs 2 mths
Fermanagh District Council	Florencecourt Forest	10 yrs 10 mths
Bulrush Horticulture Ltd.	Portglenone Forest	2 yrs 2 mths
The Sports Council for NI	Tollymore Forest Park	21 yrs 11 mths
Woodland Trust	Gosford Forest Park	14 yrs 2 mths
Armagh City Council	Loughgall Forest	15 yrs 10 mths
St. Marys Church Trustees	Portglenone Forest	85 yrs 7 mths
Newry & Mourne District Council	Rostrevor Forest	Expired under review
St. Genevieve's	Tollymore Forest Park	Expired under review
Arqiva	Gortin Glen Forest	Expired under review

Agri-Food Strategy Board: Appointments

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the criteria that will be used to appoint members to the Agri-food Strategy Board; (ii) the completion date for the appointment process; (iii) whether the positions will be remunerated; (iv) the proposed remuneration scale; and (v) if the posts are not to be remunerated, why this decision was taken, given that remuneration is offered for positions on similar bodies such as the Livestock Meat Commission.

(AQW 8500/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: i) The criteria used to appoint members will be:

A proven track record of contributing successfully at Board level to the strategic direction of a complex organisation;

A proven ability to work at a strategic level with stakeholders from different perspectives to agree a common strategy and evaluate and monitor progress against agreed targets; and

A good knowledge of the issues facing the local economy and a good understanding of the strategic issues facing the local agri-food industry.

- ii) We are aiming to have the Agri-food Strategy Board (AFSB) up and running by April 2012.
- iii) Members will receive no remuneration but will be entitled to claim reasonable travelling expenses at current Civil Service rates for attending meetings.
- iv) See above.
- v) Members will not be remunerated as the AFSB is an advisory body with no executive functions.

Schmallenberg Virus

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) when she consulted departmental vets about the threat of the Schmallenberg Virus; (ii) when her Department alerted sheep and cattle farmers about the threat; and (iii) to outline the threat posed by the Virus.

(AQW 8505/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) Policy and Veterinary Service officials from my Department met with representatives of the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute on 12 January 2012 to discuss our response to reported cases of Schmallenberg Virus in Northern Europe. My officials briefed me on 17 January 2012 on proposed action by the Department in relation to additional surveillance for the disease and communication with stakeholders.
- (ii) On 19 January 2012 my officials invited key stakeholders to a meeting to discuss the Department's proposed response and alerted them to information regarding the disease on the Department's website. On 20 January 2012, my officials wrote to all importers of ruminant animals from mainland Europe (from 01 June 2011) advising them of the threat.
- (iii) Veterinary risk assessment has indicated that the risk posed by Schmallenberg virus is considered to be low to medium with a high degree of uncertainty. Animals, particularly pregnant animals, imported from regions where Schmallenberg virus has been actively circulating pose the highest risk of introduction of the infection to north of Ireland. Incursion by infected midges is considered as a negligible risk unless the virus becomes widespread in the west of Britain. The high degree of uncertainty is due to the limited amount of knowledge so far accrued about this new emerging virus.

The threat to humans is considered negligible.

Veterinary Work: Private Arrangements

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given her proposal to reduce private veterinary work on farms, thereby reducing the number of practising vets and their ability to

respond to an outbreak, what plans are in place to deal with a major outbreak of animal or poultry disease or infection.

(AQW 8507/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have no proposal to reduce private veterinary work on farms. I greatly value the role played by private vets and have recently met with the veterinary associations to reassure them of this. However in line with a Public Accounts Committee (PAC) recommendation, my officials are currently exploring the use of lay TB testers which the PAC suggested might offer significant cost savings over current testing arrangements. The European Commission has now clarified that lay testers can be used for TB testing.

With regard to epizootic outbreak contingency plans my officials are currently reviewing arrangements for obtaining private veterinary assistance during an outbreak. As part of this process my veterinary officials will be in discussions with the veterinary organisations.

Veterinary Work: Private Arrangements

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she intends to reduce private veterinary work, such as Tuberculosis testing on farms; and for her assessment of the impact a reduction would have on the number of vets and on overall veterinary surveillance and animal health.

(AQW 8508/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I greatly value the role played by private vets and have recently met with the veterinary associations to reassure them of this. However in line with a Public Accounts Committee (PAC) recommendation, my officials are currently exploring the use of lay TB testers which the PAC suggested might offer significant cost savings over current testing arrangements. The European Commission has now clarified that lay testers can be used for TB testing.

The DARD draft Budget published on 15 December 2010 included a proposed savings measure relating to lay TB testing. A lay testing pilot was completed in December 2011 and is currently being evaluated. I am mindful of the important wider role played by private vets and confident that veterinary surveillance and animal health will not suffer under current plans.

Schmallenberg Virus

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the (i) recognisable symptoms of the Schmallenberg Virus; and (ii) its possible impact on (a) breeding livestock; (b) consumer confidence in the lamb or beef industry; and (iii) possible mutations to livestock affecting farmers' income and personal health.

(AQW 8509/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) Schmallenberg virus infection has been associated with fever, milk drop and transient diarrhoea in adult cattle. Due to the ability of the virus to cross the placenta and infect the foetus, it has been identified as causing deformities in new-born lambs, calves and goat kids. These deformities are mainly caused by severe central nervous system lesions and limb abnormalities such as contracted joints (cannot straighten legs). Nervous signs range from 'dummy' type animals, to those showing marked paralysis or blindness. Abortions have been also attributed to the virus.
- (ii) (a) The impact on adult animals appears to be transient and the subclinical effect of schmallenberg virus infection on longer term milk yield has not yet been evaluated. The biggest impact is linked to neonatal losses, particularly in sheep, where case reports have indicated that up to 50% of off-spring have been affected, although provisionally a level of 8-10% appears to be more likely from affected sheep farms on continental Europe. Cattle herds seem to be affected to a lesser extent but many factors will impact on the frequency and clinical signs of infection with Schmallenberg virus.
- (ii) (b) Current advice is that human health risks are negligible and thus consumer confidence in lamb and beef should remain high.

- (iii) Clearly livestock losses through neonatal mortality or reduced productivity in adult livestock will impact on farmers' income, and the impact will depend on the extent of clinical infection in the herd. Current advice is that the risks to farmers' health are negligible.

Agricultural, Hunting and Fishing Industries: Employment

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given that around 75 percent of the people employed in the agricultural, hunting and fishing industries are self-employed, what advice and support her Department provides in relation to accounting and management.

(AQW 8518/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department, through the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) is providing advice and support to the agricultural industries through development planning, industry training and benchmarking programmes. For the 2010/11 year, 1765 farmers and growers had a development plan prepared, 3030 people participated in management training and 897 businesses were benchmarked.

In addition, as part of the NI Rural Development Programme, Farm Family Options scheme, 58 trainees were provided with support for courses related to accounting and management. The programme is currently closed for review but should reopen soon.

Postage and Printing Costs

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department, and its arm's-length bodies, give elected representatives the choice of receiving reports and all other correspondence by email to minimise postage and printing costs.

(AQW 8522/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Department and its arm's length bodies do not formally offer elected representatives a choice in every specific piece of correspondence. However, queries from individual MLAs are answered in accordance with the wishes of the MLA by either email or in hard-copy.

With regard to responses on specific Assembly-related business (such as Assembly Questions and Statements), the Department adheres to Assembly guidance and protocol.

Líofa: Funding

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what (i) funding; and (ii) support her Department has provided to the Líofa 2012 initiative to date; and what plans she has to support the initiative in the future.

(AQW 8544/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As part of the commitment given by this Assembly to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, all public bodies in the north of Ireland are required to encourage the use of Irish and Ulster-Scots. As a large public service provider, DARD is also expected to take some steps to raise awareness levels too.

The DCAL Líofa initiative provides a vehicle for my Department to raise awareness of the Irish language and culture. The Council of Europe Charter on Regional or Minority Languages is designed to protect and promote regional or minority languages. At present, the Charter obligations apply to each language differently, as Part II of the Charter applies to Irish and Ulster-Scots and Part III applies only to Irish.

DARD will help further promote and develop the Líofa initiative in rural areas by organising three further localised Líofa launches outside of Belfast and Derry in the coming months. In addition to these, the Líofa initiative will be promoted at this year's Balmoral Show and also across the DARD Direct offices.

No direct funding has been provided by DARD in support of the Líofa initiative.

Slaughterhouses: Welfare Practices

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the current welfare practices in slaughter houses; and for her assessment of the benefits of a mandatory CCTV scheme for slaughter houses.

(AQW 8547/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The welfare of animals at slaughterhouses here is subject to the requirements the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1996, which set out the basic requirements for the operation of slaughterhouses in order to prevent any unnecessary suffering for animals prior to and during the slaughter process.

Veterinary Officers from my Department are present in all approved slaughterhouses during times of slaughter each day and as part of regular audits. Their role includes verification that the slaughterhouse operator fulfils their obligations under the legislation.

To ensure that animals are killed humanely, no person can slaughter animals in a slaughterhouse here without going through an assessment and licensing process. Slaughtermen are licensed by my Department under the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1996, which ensures that anyone who handles animals in a slaughterhouse has an adequate level of knowledge, training and competence.

As well as Departmental monitoring and licensing systems, most establishments here have designated Animal Welfare Officers. These systems ensure a high level of welfare protection in slaughterhouses.

Late last year I met Kate Fowler, Animal Aid's Campaign Manager, to discuss CCTV in slaughterhouses. I made the point that my officials have a constant presence at point of slaughter.

There is no evidence in the north of Ireland to suggest that mandatory CCTV is necessary to prevent acts of animal cruelty in slaughterhouses. In one of the highly publicised cases of animal cruelty in a slaughterhouse in Britain, the plant had CCTV installed and this did not prevent the welfare incident occurring. I would argue that CCTV is not the perfect solution that some advocates maintain.

When considering the introduction of mandatory CCTV we should be mindful that thirteen of the twenty slaughterhouses here have already installed CCTV voluntarily. Two further plants have CCTV in place but not in the stunning area. The five remaining slaughterhouses are relatively small plants.

Given the high level of welfare protection currently in place, I would prefer to try and secure agreement from the five remaining plants to install CCTV voluntarily rather than introduce legislation. I intend to approach the slaughterhouses directly on this matter.

My Department is currently considering the role CCTV might play in helping ensure business operators comply with their obligations under EC Regulation 1099/2009 concerning the welfare of animals at the time of killing, which comes into effect on 1 January 2013. At my request, my veterinary officials have alerted the red meat industry to the potential benefits of CCTV in meat plants and have encouraged them to use it on a voluntary basis.

If I feel that it is necessary to consider the introduction of compulsory monitoring using CCTV, I would want to assess the available evidence and also to examine developments in Britain and the south with input from stakeholders, including animal welfare groups and slaughterhouse operators, before making my decision.

I would also inform you that my Veterinarians are currently carrying out a week-long, comprehensive animal welfare survey in all abattoirs across the North of Ireland. This survey is being carried out in addition to the daily checks and audits carried out in all abattoirs here. The results will enable DARD to assess welfare standards in each establishment and to target any follow-up action which may be required.

River Designation: Cloughfin/Altamuskin

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the process and criteria for designating a river; and whether she will give consideration to designating the River Cloughfin and the River Altamuskin in County Tyrone.

(AQW 8625/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Designation of watercourses in the north of Ireland is the responsibility of the Drainage Council for NI which operates as an independent advisory Non Departmental Public Body. It is therefore not within my remit to make decisions on designations of watercourses although my officials can make recommendations to the Drainage Council. Likewise the criteria set for watercourses being considered for designation are also identified by the Drainage Council. I can advise that there are two overriding criteria which must be met. That the cost of the proposed works resulting from designation would satisfy appropriate appraisal criteria, either in quantifiable cost/benefit terms (as in the case of flood defence and drainage schemes) or qualitative terms such as a reduction in the risk to life or damage to property from flooding (as in the case of repair and maintenance). The second overriding criteria is that the works meet the conditions for prioritisation to be included in my Rivers Agency programme of works and that they have a satisfactory priority assessment. Whilst the overriding criteria must be met if designation is to be considered, it is worth noting that assuming these are met one condition that qualifies a watercourse to be considered for designation is where the works required are outside the capability of the riparians to organise and carry out at their own expense. In respect of the Cloughfin and Altamuskin rivers, a section of the Cloughfin is already designated. Those undesignated areas of the Cloughfin and the whole of the Altamuskin are unlikely to ever meet the existing designation criteria given the very few properties affected when considering the materiality of any works required.

Agricultural Shows: Ministerial Attendance

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many agricultural shows she has attended since May 2011; and how many she plans to attend in the next twelve months.

(AQW 8626/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I welcome the opportunity to emphasize the importance I attach to Agricultural Shows. I consider these to be an integral part of rural life, giving rural communities a focal point and encouraging interest in farming amongst potential farmers of the future and the wider general public.

I have attended seven agricultural shows since May 2011. These were the International and National Ploughing Championships, the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society (RUAS) Winter Fair and four local agricultural shows. Diary commitments permitting, I would hope to attend a similar

number of agricultural shows in the next twelve months in addition to the RUAS Balmoral Show in May 2012.

Agricultural Shows: Ministerial Attendance

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how she decides which agricultural shows she will attend.

(AQW 8627/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Agricultural shows make an important contribution to the development of the Agri-food industry and rural communities.

I plan to demonstrate my commitment to these events by attending all the major agricultural shows and local shows held in the north during my time as Minister. The order in which I will attend these events is very much dependant on balancing diary commitments with my desire to visit events at locations spread across the north in any single year.

Stewardship Areas: DARD Funding

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans she has to develop Stewardship areas which are funded by her Department.

(AQW 8653/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department provides already provides funding to manage stewardship areas under Measure 2.2 of the Rural Development Programme 2007 – 2013. These stewardship areas, such as Environmentally Sensitive Areas, are managed under agri-environment scheme agreement. Farmers and landowners received funding in return for managing their land for environmental benefit. The schemes aim to enhance biodiversity, improve water quality, enhance the landscape and help reduce the impact of climate change.

Scheme participants have agreed plans which identify habitats and provide management requirements which ensure that habitats are managed to benefit wildlife, plants and landscape features. There are currently 12,100 scheme participants and over 440,000 hectares of farmland being managed to bring environmental benefit to our countryside. I expect this area to increase in 2012 with the signing of around 1000 new agreements.

Rural Development Programme: Crossmaglen Memorial and Heritage Committee

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to the application for Rural Development Programme funding, under Measure 3.6, by the Crossmaglen Memorial and Heritage Committee (i) on what date the application was lodged with Southern Organisation for Action in Rural Areas; (ii) by what process officials deemed the application to be eligible; and (iii) whether she had any involvement in the decision making process.

(AQW 8686/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The application from Crossmaglen Memorial and Heritage Committee was lodged with Southern Organisation for Action in Rural Areas (SOAR) on 28 September 2010.

Advice on eligibility was relayed to the Chair of the SOAR Joint Council Committee by my officials on 26 January 2012, following a request by the previous Chair to review earlier advice.

I have had no involvement in the decision making process.

Rural Development Programme: Republican Monument, Crossmaglen

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the basis on which the decision was made that the republican monument in Crossmaglen was eligible for funding under Measure 3.6 of the Rural Development Programme.

(AQW 8704/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Recommendations about eligibility of projects, including this one, are determined by the Lead Council and the Local Action Group and referred to the Joint Council Committee (JCC) for a decision. Advice was sought from the Department about this project and was relayed to the Chair of the SOAR JCC on 26 January 2012.

Rural Development Programme: Republican Monument, Crossmaglen

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when the Department first received an application to fund the Crossmaglen republican monument under Measure 3.6 of the Rural Development Programme.

(AQW 8706/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Applications to Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme are not received directly by my Department but by the Lead Council in the cluster contracted by my Department to deliver the programme – in this case Southern Organisation for Action in Rural Areas (SOAR).

An application from Crossmaglen Memorial & Heritage Committee was received by SOAR under Measure 3.6 of Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme on 28 September 2010.

Flooding: South and East Belfast

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on any investigative work being carried out, and any subsequent remedial action planned, to address problems in flooding hotspots in South and East Belfast.

(AQW 8741/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Rivers Agency has completed 2 major Feasibility Studies associated with watercourses in East Belfast, the Loop River Feasibility Study and the East Belfast Watercourse Feasibility Study Stage 3 and is currently in partnership with Belfast City Council in the construction of river flood alleviation works on the Loop and Knock Rivers and the Connswater in East Belfast. One major culvert on the Loop River at Castlereagh has also been constructed. In order to reduce flood risk in East Belfast, further projects falling out of these Feasibility Studies will be developed; progress will of course depend on available funding and priority against other such schemes proposed in the Province. My Rivers Agency also conducts routine weekly inspections and clearing of grilles in south and east Belfast which are also inspected and cleared on receipt of any extreme rainfall weather warnings. The Rivers Agency is also responsible for a network of culverts and open watercourses throughout south and east Belfast which have been designated under the terms of the Drainage (NI) Order 1973. This network is routinely inspected and various maintenance and upgrade works are carried out on an on-going basis.

Tuberculosis: Cattle

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to list (i) the number of cattle taken to slaughterhouses following a positive TB herd inspection; and (ii) the number which subsequently tested negative for TB, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8787/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

- i) 8390 TB reactors were slaughtered during 2008.
8198 TB reactors were slaughtered during 2009.
6404 TB reactors were slaughtered during 2010.
4548 TB reactors were slaughtered up to August 2011.
- ii) 5092 TB reactors were not confirmed TB positive during 2008.
4843 TB reactors were not confirmed TB positive during 2009.
3576 TB reactors were not confirmed TB positive during 2010.
2507 TB reactors slaughtered up to August 2011 were not confirmed TB positive.

A confirmed TB positive is defined as the presence of visible evidence of TB at slaughter and/or TB positive laboratory tests. Reference is made only to reactors up to August 2011 because of the lag time to fully complete confirmatory procedures and include the results in official statistics.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Hospitality: Spend

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what has been the total spend on hospitality by her Department in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8073/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): In the financial years 2006-07 to 2010-11 inclusive, the Department's spending on hospitality was as follows:

2006-07	£32,493
2007-08	£41,117
2008-09	£64,452
2009-10	£44,930
2010-11	£37,027

Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises: DCAL Spend

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much her Department has spent on conferences, away-days and team building exercises in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8098/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In the financial years 2008-09 to 2010-11 inclusive, the Department's spending on conferences, away-days and team building exercises was as follows:

2008-09	£23,197
2009-10	£25,380
2010-11	£15,830

Fuel: DCAL Spend

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much her Department, and its agencies, have spent on fuel in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8235/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The table below indicates the spend that the Department and its agencies have incurred over the last 5 years.

Year	Cost £
2006/07	32,074
2007/08	32,270
2008/09	32,809
2009/10	41,901
2010/11	40,213

Equality Impact Assessments and Consultations: DCAL Spend

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much her Department has spent on (i) Equality Impact Assessments; and (ii) consultations in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8441/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín:

- (i) There were no Equality Impact Assessments undertaken by my Department in the last three financial years.
- (ii) The total spend on consultations in the last three financial years was £ 4,817.00.

Water Bailiffs: Number Employed

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number of (i) water bailiffs employed; and (ii) voluntary water bailiffs licensed, by her Department.

(AQW 8449/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín:

- (i) There are currently 11 Fishery Protection Officers employed by the Department.
- (ii) Voluntary water bailiffs are not licensed by DCAL, but warranted by the Courts (through an Angling Club) under Part 9 the 1966 Fisheries Act. There are currently 289 Private Water Bailiffs warranted.

Water Bailiffs: Training and Support

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what training and support her Department provides for licensed voluntary water bailiffs.

(AQW 8450/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department organised training seminars for Private Water Bailiffs at three locations in 2010, which were well attended and covered all aspects of enforcement regulations. There was also a question and answer session where further issues were clarified for Private Water Bailiffs.

The Department encourages, where possible, contact between DCAL Fishery Protection Officers, Senior Fisheries Officers and Private Water Bailiffs and their respective angling clubs. This can take the form of organising joint enforcement operations and attending Angling Club AGM's to discuss angling related issues including enforcement.

The Department also provides practical advice and guidance to Private Water Bailiffs on the preparation and processing of prosecution cases.

Líofa: Funding

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) how much funding her Department is providing for the Líofa 2012 scheme; (ii) how much funding other Departments are providing to the scheme; (iii) how much the overall marketing and launch costs for the scheme have been to date; and (iv) whether she plans to introduce an equivalent scheme to promote the development and learning of Ulster-Scots.

(AQW 8466/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín:

- (i) I am in the process of appointing a Líofa Development Officer who will be in post for a period of one year however, this may be extended for a further year subject to the agreement of all parties. The salary scale will be £27,115 to £30,520 and will be paid by DCAL.
I will be allocating further funds to the Líofa 2015 project as appropriate.
- (ii) I am not aware of the level of funding assigned to the Líofa initiative by other Departments.
- (iii) The breakdown of cost for the Líofa 2015 initiative launch is as follows:

	Cost
Interpreters	£251.90
Website	£1217.16
Banners	£ 178.00
Hospitality	£ 694.80
Total	£2341.86

- (iv) I have already met with the Chief Executive of the Ulster-Scots Agency and also with the Ministerial Advisory Group on the Ulster-Scots Academy to discuss how best to promote Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture effectively. I will be meeting with the Chief Executive of the Ulster-Scots Agency and the Minister for Education soon to progress this issue.

Cultural Infrastructure: DCAL Spend

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the expenditure by her Department on cultural infrastructure through capital projects in the Programme for Government period 2008-2011; and to detail the reasons behind any underspend on the projected £119 million investment.

(AQW 8472/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Detail of the Department's total expenditure on cultural infrastructure in the period 2008-2011 is detailed below:

	Total Budget 2008-11 £'000	Total Spend 2008-11 £'000	Variance £'000
Arts	31,547	30,309	1,238
Museums	22,915	21,793	1,122
Libraries	31,600	12,345	19,255
Fisheries	954	864	90
N/S Languages	-	43	43
Waterways Ireland	5,450	5,295	155
PRONI	28,625	27,939	686
Cultural Total	121,091 *	98,588	22,503

* Post agreement of 2008-11 PSA targets a further £2m was allocated to Capital

As illustrated in the table above the outcome was a total underspend of approximately £22m on the £121 million investment.

The two main contributing factors to the underspend were as follows:

- In ISNI2 £25m was set aside for library capital. This figure was based upon the ELBs high level plans for an extensive capital build programme. Unfortunately these plans were not sufficiently developed and the ELBs did not have sufficient capacity to spend the capital allocation and slippage of approximately £19m occurred.
- Slippage in Arts projects of around £1.2m, mainly due to Year 1 delays in the three main projects (Crescent Arts Centre, Lyric Theatre, Metropolitan Arts Centre), which have since been largely made up.
- A further £1.1m was not spent in Museums. This was because the plans for a new library at the Armagh Observatory and Planetarium could not be progressed within the 2008-11 CSR period.

Ulster-Scots Academy: Ministerial Advisory Group

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the progress of the Ministerial Advisory Group for the Ulster-Scots Academy.

(AQW 8517/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Ministerial Advisory Group for the Ulster Scots Academy was established in March 2011 to advise on the development of an Ulster Scots Academy. The Group is committed to funding

projects that fall under three main streams of activity: Language and Literature; Heritage and Culture and Education and Research.

Examples of projects which have already received such funding are the refurbishment of the existing gallery room in the Andrew Jackson Cottage, an inventory of all materials relating to Ulster-Scots that exist in various collections held in local libraries and museums and the digital interpretation of the Raven Maps in North Down Museum.

The Group is currently considering a variety of projects which include an archaeological survey of the plantation period, development of educational materials on Ulster Scots history, heritage and literature to curriculum standard as well as support to the development of the Ulster Scots tourism product.

A draft research and development strategy has been prepared and they also plan to launch a grant scheme in the near future.

Postage and Printing Costs

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether her Department, and its arm's-length bodies, give elected representatives the choice of receiving reports and all other correspondence by email to minimise postage and printing costs.

(AQW 8523/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department follows OFMDFM's 'Guidance on the Distribution of Departmental Publications and Consultation Documents' (July 2011) in the dissemination of reports and consultation documents.

Where appropriate my Department, and its arm's length bodies (ALBs), provide copies of reports and correspondence in the requested format. Furthermore, copies of ALBs annual reports are available on the organisations websites.

Salmon Stocks: River Bush

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number of salmon fry or smolts that have been released into the River Bush as part of a restocking programme in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 8548/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Details of the numbers of salmon fry, parr and smolts released into the River Bush are contained in the table below.

	Fry	Parr	Smolts
2010	0	0	74,451
2009	200,000	101,300	48,754
2008	582,000	108,500	45,867
2007	0	31,000	49,366
2006	150,000	59,500	71,484
2005	150,000	138,800	46,898
2004	128,000	280,695	53,596
2003	440,000	175,524	17,398
2002	401,000	167,000	46,163
2001	368,000	0	79,174

Commemoration Project Steering Group

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the membership and the work carried out to date by the Commemoration Project Steering Group.

(AQW 8571/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am supportive of an inclusive and strategic approach to commemorations and creative ways that the arts and cultural sectors can help to tell the stories behind such events.

Previous Departmental approaches, before my time in office, examined ways to approach significant anniversaries. This included a Commemoration Project Steering Group which met twice in 2010. In 2011 the Community Relations Council and Heritage Lottery Fund developed a set of principles to remember the past in the context of an inclusive and accepting society. The key issue is not whether these events are remembered but how they are remembered.

I endorse these principles. They provide a more inclusive, non triumphalist and strategic basis to guide Departmental activities and can inform a wider body of work and a joined-up approach across government, and by other stakeholders, to remember significant events from the distant and more recent past.

Civil Service: Posts

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 7692/11-15, and given Derry's City of Culture celebrations in 2013 and the ongoing development of Derry's creative industries, why her Department does not have any civil servants based in Derry; and what plans she has to address this regional disparity.

(AQW 8606/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My officials are working closely with colleagues across government and the partners in Derry to progress funding and support for the City of Culture but there are no plans to decentralise any posts within my Department and at this time there are no plans to do so in the immediate future.

Libraries: Lisburn Road Opening Hours

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she will consider restoring the opening hours of the Lisburn Road library to two evenings per week.

(AQW 8699/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Following Libraries NI's public consultation into its review of Library Opening Hours, I was pleased to be able to provide £2.39m of additional funding in order to minimise the impact of the reduction in library opening hours.

The additional money has eased the financial pressure on Libraries NI. However, Libraries NI is still faced with making savings.

Decisions regarding individual library opening hours are an operational matter for the Libraries NI Board, however I understand that discussions will take place with each community about when they would like to see their library open.

Inland Fisheries: Staff

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many staff within Inland Fisheries have (i) been suspended; or (ii) taken unpaid or paid leave for a period of more than three months in the last 2 years.

(AQW 8701/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín:

- (i) I am unable to supply information in relation to part one of this question as the information relates to living individuals who could be identified from the data. This would be a breach of Principle I of the Data Protection Act 1998.

- (ii) Within Inland Fisheries, no staff have taken unpaid or paid leave for a period of more than 3 months in the last 2 years.

Fishing: Licence Checks

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether licences are always checked during the sale of nets to fishermen.

(AQW 8702/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There is nothing in the current fisheries legislation which requires those selling nets to seek evidence of a licence from purchasers.

Many nets used by fishermen here would be purchased outside the DCAL jurisdiction and sellers would have no interest in the legality of their use.

NI Screen: Board Appointments

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure why she appointed a convicted terrorist to the Board of NI Screen.

(AQW 8736/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The competition to appoint members to the Board of NI Screen was carried out in line with the Commissioner for Public Appointment NI's Code of Practice for Ministerial Public Appointments.

Appointments to the Board were made on the basis of merit and only those judged to meet the requirements of the post were considered by me for appointment.

I am confident that the new members will provide the Board with the necessary range of skills and experience to build on the success of NI Screen in developing our local screen industries.

Soccer: Capital Investment in Brandywell Stadium

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) when she will make an announcement regarding the second tranche of the £36 million capital investment in soccer facilities; and (ii) how much will be available for the redevelopment of the Brandywell Stadium, Derry; and when the funding will be available.

(AQW 8754/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Executive have endorsed c. £36m funding for sub-regional development within association football "as a priority area of spend in the next CSR period" (2015 onwards). While a strong endorsement it is not the same as agreeing to fund sub-regional stadium development. Funding for this purpose still needs to be secured as part of the normal budgetary process for CSR 2015. Given this position, I have no plans to make an announcement regarding funding for sub - regional football.

In anticipation of making a bid for this funding in the next CSR period my Department has asked the IFA, (with the help of Sport NI) to develop a Strategic Outline Case (SOC) setting out at a high level the needs to be addressed. Thereafter Business cases will need to be developed for individual projects to inform the CSR bid. This work has not yet been completed and therefore no specific projects or grounds have as yet been identified.

Creative Industries Apprenticeships: BBC/UTV

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many creative industries apprenticeships have been awarded by the BBC and UTV in each year since 2008.

(AQW 8772/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department and NI Screen do not hold information regarding creative industries apprenticeships awarded by the BBC and UTV. This would be a matter for the BBC and UTV.

I can confirm that NI Screen in partnership with the BBC and Skillset initiated a training scheme in 2011 called AIM HIGH. The scheme revolves around the placement of 15 new entrants in a variety of roles within the media sector in the North of Ireland. However, NI Screen have clarified that they would not consider these placements to fall into the legal definition of apprenticeships.

Rory McIlroy: US Open Success

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what promotional activity and actions were undertaken by her Department to take advantage of the success of Rory McIlroy in the WGC Match Play Golf event in Arizona.

(AQW 8914/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) does not undertake promotional activity and actions directly in relation to the performance of individual athletes or teams whilst they are participating in sporting competitions including competitions such as the WGC Match Play Golf event in Arizona. I do, however, seek to promote sporting excellence generally in the north by regularly celebrating sporting success publicly. In the case of Rory McIlroy I publicly acknowledged his success in winning the US Open Golf Tournament in June 2011. I also invited Rory to my Sports Reception held at Parliament Buildings in January 2012. This reception is organised annually by my Department as a means of promoting and publicly recognising sporting successes of local athletes in national and international competitions.

Department of Education

Area Plans: Consultation

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education what timescale each Education and Library Board is working towards in relation to launching consultations on the proposed area plans.

(AQW 8169/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The Terms of Reference for area planning, published on 15 December 2011, asked Education and Library Boards to submit plans by the end of March and end of June for the post-primary and primary phases respectively. In view of the scale and complexity of the work involved, however, these timescales are necessarily indicative.

Once received, the Department will consider the draft plans and, when satisfied that they meet the requirements of the Terms of Reference and the Departmental policy framework, will authorise the Boards to proceed to public consultation.

Grants

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to detail all grants, for any purpose, that are currently available through his Department.

(AQW 8277/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There are a number of different types of grants allocated through my Department and these are listed below.

Grant-in-aid to provide general support to each of the Department's Arms Length Bodies. Paid to:-

- | | |
|---|---|
| ■ The Belfast Education and Library Board | ■ The Western Education and Library Board |
| ■ The North-Eastern Education and Library Board | ■ The Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment |
| ■ The South-Eastern Education and Library Board | ■ The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools |
| ■ The Southern Education and Library Board | ■ The Staff Commission |
| | ■ The Youth Council for NI |

- The General Teaching Council for NI
- Middletown Centre for Autism Limited
- Middletown Centre for Autism (Holdings) Limited
- Boards of Governors of Grant Maintained Integrated Schools
- Boards of Governors of Voluntary Grammar Schools
- Boards of Governors of Irish Medium Schools

Boards of Governors of Catholic Maintained Schools Current grant provided for specific purposes.

Paid to:-

- Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta
- Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta Accommodation Fund
- NI Council for Integrated Education
- British Council
- Women's Aid Federation
- National Children's Bureau (NIABF), previously Save the Children
- Childline (Helpline Expansion)
- National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
- The Gaelic Athletic Association
- The Irish Football Association
- Music for Youth
- The Queen's University, Belfast
- The University of Ulster
- Early Years, The Organisation for Young Children
- NI Childminding Association
- The Health & Social Care Board (for Sure Start and related services)
- Early Years Fund (administered on behalf of DE by the Early Years Organisation)
- Charter Work Experience
- School Employer Connections
- NI Centre for Information & Language Teaching
- An Gaelaras
- BT Young Scientist
- Irish Science Olympiads
- Stock Market Challenge
- Business Education Partnerships
- Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS)
- Sentinus
- Stranmillis University College
- St Mary's University College
- Young Enterprise NI

Public Health Agency Capital Grants for approved Capital Works. Paid to:-

- Trustees of Voluntary Grammar Schools
- Trustees of Grant Maintained Integrated Schools
- Trustees of Irish Medium Schools

Trustees of Catholic Maintained Schools Voluntary Youth Projects – Capital Grants. Paid to:-

- Trustees of Voluntary Youth Centres

The Department also provides financial support for the Community Relations, Equality and Diversity (CRED) policy through the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) and the Youth Council (YCNI). A minimum of 20% of this funding must be used to support meaningful interaction between young people with different social, cultural or religious backgrounds. ELBs distribute this funding through the CRED Enhancement Scheme to which schools apply. YCNI provide funding to three strategic projects that support implementation of the policy.

Speech and Language Services

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Education who, in each Education and Library Board, is responsible for undertaking initial needs assessments for children who may require access to speech and language services.

(AQW 8290/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards (ELBs) have advised that initial needs assessments are carried out by the ELBs' Educational Psychology Services (EPS). The EPS will refer any child assessed

as requiring speech and language support to the Speech and Language Services in the relevant Health and Social Care Trust.

Educational Underachievement: Children with Disabilities

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what action his Department is taking in relation to the educational underachievement of children with disabilities compared with children without disabilities. **(AQW 8300/11-15)**

Mr O'Dowd: I am committed to tackling underachievement and promoting the raising of standards for all our young people.

Pupils with disabilities must not be discriminated against in any way by a school, an education and library board or any other body responsible for a school. Schools and ELBs are required to put in place strategies to improve access for pupils with disabilities to the curriculum, the physical environment of the school, and the written information, education and associated services offered by the school.

Schools themselves, including through rigorous self-evaluation, are best placed to identify areas for improvement and to drive changes that can bring about better outcomes for all their pupils. The school improvement policy aims to support schools and teachers in their work to raise standards and overcome the barriers to learning many young people face. It is supported by a range of policies aimed at raising standards, including the literacy and numeracy strategy, the revised curriculum and Entitlement Framework, the Extended and Full Service Schools Programmes and work to finalise strategies on early years and special educational needs and inclusion.

Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises: DE Spend

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how much his Department has spent on conferences, away-days and team building exercises in each of the last three years. **(AQW 8336/11-15)**

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below:

Financial Year	Conferences (£)	Away Days (£)	Team Building Exercises (£)	Total (£)
2008/09	157,015.21	38,134.50	0	195,149.71
2009/10	58,580.47	30,284.83	0	88,865.30
2010/11	26,221.43	13,171.00	0	39,392.43

Fuel: DE Spend

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 7971/11-15, how much his Department, and its arm's-length bodies have spent on all other types of fuel in each of the last five years. **(AQW 8463/11-15)**

Mr O'Dowd:

Fuel Costs					£'000
Financial Years	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
BELB	2,916	2,377	3,110	2,325	2,384
NEELB	2,453	2,448	3,483	2,940	3,466
SEELB	1,979	2,150	2,687	2,560	2,335

Fuel Costs					£'000
Financial Years	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
SELB	2,384	2,944	3,190	3,215	3,972
WELB	2,150	2,356	2,806	2,683	3,168
CCEA	24	35	31	37	44
CCMS	18	20	30	19	30
Staff Commission	1	1	1	1	1
YCNi	2	2	2	2	2
GTC	1	1	1	2	2
Exceptional Circumstances Body	-	-	-	-	-
DE	-	-	-	-	-
Totals	11,929	12,333	15,341	13,785	15,403

Notes:

- 1 The above figures relate to gas and oil costs only as confirmed by your office.
- 2 Figures provided by the ELBs include costs, if applicable, associated with the Public Library Service up to and including 2008/09.
- 3 DE costs will be included in the DFP return as these are paid centrally by DFP on behalf of my Department.

Schools: Expenditure on Front Line Services

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the percentage of annual spending directed towards front-line services in schools; and (ii) how this compares to other regions in the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 8476/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

- (i) It is not possible to accurately disaggregate the funding for frontline services in schools. In 2011/12 the Aggregated Schools Budget of £1,126m – which is distributed directly to schools under the Common Funding Scheme arrangements – represents 59.4% of the Department's total Resource Budget. However a number of budgets are held and managed by the Education and Library Boards on behalf of schools in their area, for which funding is not delegated to schools. This includes provision for special educational needs in mainstream, pupil support, e.g. educational psychologists, school library service, Curriculum Advisory Support Service and a range of other services.
- (ii) I refer the Member to my answer to AQW 7997/11-15, tabled by Peter Weir MLA, and published in the Official Report on 17 February 2012.

Nursery Schools: Development Proposals

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Education what discussions he held prior to making his recent decision on the development proposals for nursery schools.

(AQW 8538/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I recently approved development proposals for the establishment of part-time nursery units at Drumadonnell Primary School, Ballyrone and St Patrick's Primary School, Mayobridge. I also turned down a proposal to establish a nursery unit at Cranmore Integrated Primary School.

I did not receive any requests for meetings during the statutory consultation period following publication of each proposal. I therefore had no discussions with representatives of any of the schools or other interested parties prior to making my recent decisions.

My decisions were reached taking account of all the pertinent information submitted by the proposers and additional information and advice compiled by my officials, including the views of the Education and Training Inspectorate.

Nursery Schools: Development Proposal for St Patrick's Primary School, Mayobridge.

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Education, to detail (i) what information he has received in the last three months in relation to the development proposal for nursery provision at St Patrick's Primary School, Mayobridge; (ii) from where this information came; and (iii) whether he will make a public statement in relation to this matter.

(AQW 8549/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

- (i) & (ii) During the last three months I received two letters in support of the proposal, from Caitríona Ruane, MLA and the Principal of the St Patrick's Primary School.
- (iii) At the conclusion of the development proposal process a press release was issued, on 16 February, advising of my decision.

Beginning Teachers: GTC Registration

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education how many Beginning Teachers have registered with the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland in each of the last five years; and, of these, how many were trained in (i) Northern Ireland; and (ii) Great Britain.

(AQW 8562/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below:

Registration Year	Total Registered	North of Ireland Trained Teachers	Britain Trained Teachers
2010/11	849	578	266
2009/10	850	593	244
2008/09	920	615	290
2007/08	958	656	287
2006/07	1037	657	363

Source: General Teaching Council

Notes:

- 1 The registration year is regarded as the year in which the teacher was awarded their qualification.
- 2 A number of Beginning Teachers who qualified outside the north of Ireland and Britain have also registered with the GTC over the past five years.

Education and Skills Authority: Legislative Process

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education for an update on the legislative process for establishing the Education and Skills Authority. [R]

(AQW 8591/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Drafting of the Bill is almost complete and, subject to Executive agreement, I intend to introduce it in the Assembly in the very near future.

Literacy and Numeracy Co-ordinators: Qualifications

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education whether he intends to review the qualification requirements for Literacy and Numeracy Co-Ordinators in primary and post-primary schools.

(AQW 8637/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There is no requirement for literacy or numeracy co-ordinators in primary or post-primary schools to have specific qualifications beyond the requisite teaching qualifications. I have no plans to review this.

The Report of the Literacy and Numeracy Taskforce 2010/11 (May 2011) recommended that literacy or numeracy co-ordinators in primary schools should demonstrate a strong background in English and maths respectively and ideally be specialists in the respective areas.

The appointment of literacy or numeracy co-ordinators is a matter for a school's Board of Governors. While it may be possible that a graduate of English or mathematics becomes the co-ordinator for literacy or numeracy respectively, it is likely that the Board of Governors would seek to appoint a teacher who could demonstrate a number of attributes and competencies which might include: a sufficient breadth of teaching experience, a specific interest or competence in literacy or numeracy, proven leadership skills, effective communication and co-ordination skills, effective motivational skills.

Count, read: succeed - the Department's Literacy and Numeracy Strategy sets out the role of literacy and numeracy co-ordinators and stresses the importance of them being given time, authority and support to fulfil their role.

Questions for Written Answer: Stationery Costs

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how much the paper and envelopes used in providing answers to Assembly Written Questions cost per item, per box or per hundred units.

(AQW 8639/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The current cost to the Department for a box of paper containing 2500 sheets is £11.37 and the cost of a box of envelopes containing 500 is £5.56.

St Patrick's Primary School, Aghagallon: Formal Intervention Process

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education (i) for an update on the formal intervention process at St Patrick's Primary School, Aghagallon, Craigavon; and (ii) for his assessment of when the school might expect to have the formal intervention status removed.

(AQW 8664/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: St Patrick's Primary School, Aghagallon entered the Formal Intervention Process on 26 October 2010 following an inspection which resulted in the quality of education being provided by the school being evaluated as inadequate.

Since then the school has been working closely with the Southern Education and Library Board and CCMS to implement an agreed action plan aimed at addressing the areas of improvement identified in the inspection report. This work is ongoing and currently includes a particular emphasis on ensuring an improvement in the standards attained by the children in English and mathematics and bringing about improvements in the school's leadership, standards, and learning and teaching.

The Education and Training Inspectorate is monitoring the school's progress in addressing the areas of improvement and will undertake a follow-up inspection within a timescale of 12 to 18 months of the original inspection. Taking account of the findings of the follow-up inspection the Department will consider whether the school should exit the Formal Intervention Process.

Speech and Language Centre: Knockavoe School and Resource Centre, Strabane

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Education (i) how many students are currently attending the Speech and Language Centre at Knockavoe School and Resource Centre, Strabane; and (ii) how many have been statemented.

(AQW 8665/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Figures recorded in the 2011/12 school census show that there are 93 pupils enrolled in Knockavoe School and Resource centre. Fewer than 5 of these pupils are recorded as being at stages 1 – 4 of the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice. The other pupils are statemented, i.e., at Stage 5 of the Special Education Needs Code of practice.

Home to School Transport Scheme: Eligibility

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Education, for each of the last three years, to detail (i) the number of (a) primary school pupils; and (b) post-primary school pupils; and (ii) as a proportion of each total, how many pupils were eligible for free travel on existing Translink routes through the Home to School Transport scheme, excluding private buses provided for students on un-serviced routes.

(AQW 8679/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The following figures as supplied by the Education and Library Boards confirm that the total number of primary and post-primary pupils in each of the last three years for which figures are available, the proportion of each total eligible for assistance with travel on Translink services (Ulsterbus, Metro), and the sum paid to Translink in each year are as follows:-

Year	Primary	Proportion eligible using Translink	Post-Primary	Proportion eligible using Translink	Annual cost
2008/09	164,811	0.96%	147,986	31.43%	£30,424,855
2009/10	163,771	0.87%	147,759	33.27%	£32,072,243
2010/11	163,451	0.77%	147,902	33.19%	£32,350,735

Home to School Transport Scheme: Private Buses

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Education to detail the sum paid to Translink for providing travel on existing Translink routes through the Home to School Transport scheme in each of the last three years, excluding private buses provided for students on un-serviced routes.

(AQW 8680/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The following figures as supplied by the Education and Library Boards confirm that the total number of primary and post-primary pupils in each of the last three years for which figures are available, the proportion of each total eligible for assistance with travel on Translink services (Ulsterbus, Metro), and the sum paid to Translink in each year are as follows:-

Year	Primary	Proportion eligible using Translink	Post-Primary	Proportion eligible using Translink	Annual cost
2008/09	164,811	0.96%	147,986	31.43%	£30,424,855
2009/10	163,771	0.87%	147,759	33.27%	£32,072,243
2010/11	163,451	0.77%	147,902	33.19%	£32,350,735

School Transport: Private Buses on Unserviced Routes

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost to his Department of providing private buses for students on un-serviced routes, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8682/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The cost of providing privately operated buses for eligible pupils, including those with special education needs, in each of the last three years is given in the table below.

Year	Cost of Private Operators (buses)
2008/09	£5,886,616
2009/10	£6,204,556
2010/11	£5,033,806

School Transport: Special Educational Needs Provision

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost to his Department of Special Educational Needs transport provision, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8683/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The cost of transport provision for pupils with Special Education Needs for each of the last three years is provided in the table below.

Year	Cost of Taxi Element	Cost of Private Operator bus element	Total Cost of Special Needs Transport
2008/09	£4,918,036	£1,815,214	£6,733,250
2009/10	£4,901,030	£1,774,336	£6,675,366
2010/11	£5,030,674	£1,404,712	£6,435,386

Pupils: Statements at Mainstream Schools

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what percentage children, who have been statemented, have attended mainstream schools in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8756/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

PERCENTAGE PUPILS WHO HAVE A STATEMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS ENROLLED IN MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS, 2007/08 – 2011/12

Year	% statemented pupils enrolled in mainstream schools
2007/08	67.6
2008/09	68.2
2009/10	69.3
2010/11	69.6
2011/12	69.7

Source: School census

Notes:

- 1 Figures relate to pupils in mainstream classes and special units in nursery schools, primary (including nursery classes, reception and Year 1 - 7) and post primary schools.
- 2 Pupils with a statement are at Stage 5 on the Special Education Needs Code of Practice.

Department for Employment and Learning

Stranmillis University College: Financial Position

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the current financial position of Stranmillis University College, Belfast.

(AQW 7771/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): The last audited financial statements for Stranmillis University College, Belfast were for academic year 2010/11. These declared a surplus of £403k compared with a surplus of £870k in the previous year. During the year the College's income declined by 3.8% whilst its expenditure reduced by just 1.2%. The College has also provided management accounts for the 2011/12 academic year which would indicate a surplus of £442k. However, the College has forecast that it will sustain a deficit in 2012/13 of £54k and that this will rise to £430k by 2014/15. The College also reports that there is a continuing deterioration in its estate and there is a total of some £6m of back-log maintenance and a further £3m is required for the Henry Garrett

Building. My Department is to supply a total of £1.6m of capital grant to the College by 2015.

Capital Building Programme

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail his Department's planned major capital building programmes in each of the next three years.

(AQW 8051/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department has a capital budget allocation for the three years from 2012-13 of £79.1m. This allocation is for the further education sector, the higher education sector and the Department's own capital works.

Further education's share is £26.3m, £18.3m of which is committed to projects already delivered at Belfast Metropolitan College – at Titanic Quarter and Springvale. The remaining £8m has not been allocated at this stage but is intended to address minor works and statutory compliance issues within colleges. Colleges will be asked to bid for this funding in due course.

Higher education has a capital allocation of £49.5m for the three year period. At the commencement of each budget review period the Department informs the higher education institutions of the capital budget that is being made available and invites them to submit projects for funding consideration.

In addition, there is £3.3m of funding available for capital projects within the Department. It is likely to be used for IT projects and for minor works to ensure compliance with health and safety legislation. Business areas across the Department will be invited to bid to this fund in due course.

Bachelor of Education: UCAS Points

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the grades intake for Bachelor of Education graduates compared with the rest of the UK in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8056/11-15)

Dr Farry: Average UCAS tariff points have been used as a proxy for information on grades intake.

On this basis, the average UCAS tariff points achieved on entry for first year first degree Bachelor of Education undergraduate enrolments at Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) compared with the rest of the UK (ie Great Britain HEIs) for each of the last three years is provided in the table below.

Year	NI HEIs	GB HEIs
2008/09	339	293
2009/10	344	292

Year	NI HEIs	GB HEIs
2010/11	359	309

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

- 1 The latest available data are for 2010/11.
- 2 Enrolments with an unknown UCAS score are not included in the above table.

Law Graduates: Employment

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many law graduates have been unable to secure permanent jobs in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8083/11-15)

Dr Farry: Information on the destinations of students is obtained from a survey carried out six months after graduation. As this information is derived from a survey rather than a census of the whole population, the figures in the tables below are displayed as percentages rather than numbers.

The tables overleaf display (i) the destinations of law graduates and (ii) the type of contract obtained by those law graduates in work. The tables provide details for each of the last five academic years for which data are available.

- (i) Destinations of law graduates from Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions six months after graduation

Destinations	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Work	64%	57%	64%	69%	68%
Further Study	28%	35%	24%	20%	21%
Unemployed	3%	4%	8%	7%	9%
Other destinations	5%	4%	4%	3%	2%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

- (ii) Type of contract obtained by law graduates from Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions who are in work six months after graduation.

Contract Type	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Permanent or open ended	69%	66%	51%	61%	70%
Fixed term: 12 months or longer	12%	13%	26%	13%	10%
Other contract types	20%	21%	23%	26%	20%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency

Notes:

- 1 The figures in the above tables are derived from the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey. The DLHE survey is issued to all students whose study was full-time or part-time and who obtained relevant qualifications reported to HESA for each reporting period. Response rates for the DLHE survey are generally around 80% for NI HEIs. The figures in the tables are therefore displayed as proportions as the actual number of graduates in each activity is unknown.
- 2 The figures above include graduates from both postgraduate and undergraduate courses.

- 3 Work includes those in full-time work only, part-time work only, voluntary or unpaid work and those combining work and further study.
- 4 'Other destinations' include those not seeking employment, further study or training.
- 5 Table (ii) above only includes those for whom type of contract was known.
- 6 'Other contract types' include fixed-term contracts shorter than 12 months, self-employed/freelance, temporarily through an agency and temporarily other than through an agency.
- 7 The latest year for which destinations data are available is 2009/10.

St Mary's University College: Positive Discrimination

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in light of the 2009/10 Higher Education Statistics Agency figures which indicate that the religious breakdown of students attending St Mary's University College and Stranmillis University College is 65 percent Catholic and 35 percent Protestant, what steps he is taking to ensure that St Mary's pursues a policy of positive discrimination to recruit more than the 5 Protestant students who were registered in 2009/10.

(AQW 8085/11-15)

Dr Farry: Universities and University Colleges are responsible for their own policies and procedures, including admissions.

St. Mary's University College states that it welcomes applications from people of any faith and none. Applications are considered in accordance with the College's Admissions Policy, which is aligned with that of Queen's University. Furthermore, the College's website states that it promotes equality of opportunity for all applicants regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, political opinion, religious belief, marital status or whether or not they have dependants.

I am in the process of commissioning the first stage of a study of the Teacher Education infrastructure in Northern Ireland. This will complete in Spring 2012 and the second stage in Autumn 2012.

Engineering Graduates: Employment

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many engineering graduates have been unable to secure permanent jobs in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8272/11-15)

Dr Farry: Information on the destinations of students is obtained from a survey carried out six months after graduation. As this information is derived from a survey rather than a census of the whole population, the figures in the tables below are displayed as percentages rather than numbers.

The tables below display (i) the destinations of engineering graduates and (ii) the type of contract obtained by those engineering graduates in work. The tables provide details for each of the last five academic years for which data are available.

- (i) Destinations of engineering graduates from Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions six months after graduation

Destinations	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Work	81%	82%	79%	68%	72%
Further Study	13%	10%	8%	19%	15%
Unemployed	2%	4%	8%	10%	9%
Other destinations	5%	3%	5%	4%	4%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

- (ii) Type of contract obtained by engineering graduates from Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions who are in work six months after graduation.

Contract Type	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Permanent or open ended	80%	85%	82%	74%	75%
Fixed term: 12 months or longer	11%	8%	10%	12%	6%
Other contract types	9%	7%	8%	14%	19%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency

Notes:

- 8 The figures in the above tables are derived from the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey. The DLHE survey is issued to all students whose study was full-time or part-time and who obtained relevant qualifications reported to HESA for each reporting period. Response rates for the DLHE survey are generally around 80% for NI HEIs. The figures in the tables are therefore displayed as proportions as the actual number of graduates in each activity is unknown.
- 9 The figures above include graduates from both postgraduate and undergraduate courses.
10. Work includes those in full-time work only, part-time work only, voluntary or unpaid work and those combining work and further study.
11. 'Other destinations' include those not seeking employment, further study or training.
12. Table (ii) above only includes those for whom type of contract was known.
13. 'Other contract types' include fixed-term contracts shorter than 12 months, self-employed/freelance, temporarily through an agency and temporarily other than through an agency.
14. The latest year for which destinations data are available is 2009/10.

Students: Maintenance Loans for Irish Passport Holders

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the guidance issued to Education and Library Boards on providing maintenance loans for students who hold an Irish passport, and have applied to universities in Scotland where their student fees will be paid as EU applicants.

(AQW 8312/11-15)

Dr Farry: I can confirm that my Departmental officials have recently advised Student Finance staff in the Education and Library Boards that Northern Ireland domiciled students who qualify to have their tuition fees paid by the Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS) as non-UK EU nationals are not eligible to apply to SAAS for maintenance support. These students can, however, apply as normal for maintenance support in the form of loans and grants through Student Finance Northern Ireland/via their local Education and Library Board.

Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises: DEL Spend

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much his Department has spent on conferences, away-days and team building exercises in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8338/11-15)

Dr Farry: The total cost incurred by the Department on conferences, away-days and team building exercises in each of the last three years is set out in the following table:

April 2009 to March 2010	Total: £61,730
April 2010 to March 2011	Total: £26,746

April 2011 to 17 February 2012

Total: £15,131

Veterinary Medicine: Degree Courses

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 7517/11-15, given the growth in the agri-foods industry, and the fact that of the 150 students who enrolled in courses in Britain only one third of qualified veterinary surgeons returned, why local universities do not offer degree courses in veterinary medicine.

(AQW 8347/11-15)

Dr Farry: Trends within the veterinary profession are surveyed regularly by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS). The most recent survey does not indicate any impending shortfall in the number of veterinary surgeons, nor has the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development identified any such difficulties within Northern Ireland. Furthermore, research undertaken by my Department in 2009, on forecasting future skills needs in Northern Ireland, shows that the supply of veterinary science graduates is projected to meet the indicative graduate requirement up to 2020.

Architecture Graduates: Employment

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many architecture graduates have been unable to secure permanent jobs in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8359/11-15)

Dr Farry: Information on the destinations of students is obtained from a survey carried out six months after graduation. As this information is derived from a survey rather than a census of the whole population, the figures in the tables below are displayed as percentages rather than numbers.

The tables below display (i) the destinations of architecture graduates and (ii) the type of contract obtained by those architecture graduates in work. The tables provide details for each of the last five academic years for which data are available.

- (i) Destinations of architecture graduates from Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions six months after graduation

Destinations	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Work	84%	83%	69%	74%	69%
Further Study	11%	8%	14%	11%	12%
Unemployed	2%	5%	10%	12%	15%
Other destinations	3%	4%	6%	4%	4%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

- (ii) Type of contract obtained by architecture graduates from Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions who are in work six months after graduation.

Contract Type	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Permanent or open ended	59%	65%	67%	66%	58%
Fixed term: 12 months or longer	13%	12%	15%	11%	9%
Other contract types	28%	22%	17%	24%	33%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency

Notes:

15. The figures in the above tables are derived from the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey. The DLHE survey is issued to all students whose study was full-time or part-time and who obtained relevant qualifications reported to HESA for each reporting period. Response rates for the DLHE survey are generally around 80% for NI HEIs. The figures in the tables are therefore displayed as proportions as the actual number of graduates in each activity is unknown.
16. The figures above include graduates from both postgraduate and undergraduate courses.
17. Work includes those in full-time work only, part-time work only, voluntary or unpaid work and those combining work and further study.
18. 'Other destinations' include those not seeking employment, further study or training.
19. Table (ii) above only includes those for whom type of contract was known.
20. 'Other contract types' include fixed-term contracts shorter than 12 months, self-employed/freelance, temporarily through an agency and temporarily other than through an agency.
21. The latest year for which destinations data are available is 2009/10.

Medical Graduates: Employment

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many medical graduates have been unable to secure permanent jobs in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8361/11-15)

Dr Farry: Information on the destinations of students is obtained from a survey carried out six months after graduation. As this information is derived from a survey rather than a census of the whole population, the figures in the tables below are displayed as percentages rather than numbers.

The tables below display (i) the destinations of medical graduates and (ii) the type of contract obtained by those medical graduates in work. The tables provide details for each of the last five academic years for which data are available.

- (i) Destinations of medical graduates from Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions six months after graduation

Destinations	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Work	97%	99%	98%	99%	96%
Further Study	1%	0%	1%	0%	2%
Unemployed	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%
Other destinations	3%	1%	1%	1%	2%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

- (ii) Type of contract obtained by medical graduates from Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions who are in work six months after graduation.

Contract Type	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Permanent or open ended	15%	19%	41%	79%	31%
Fixed term: 12 months or longer	82%	80%	57%	21%	66%
Other contract types	3%	2%	2%	0%	3%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency

Notes:

22. The figures in the above tables are derived from the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey. The DLHE survey is issued to all students whose study was full-time or part-time and who obtained relevant qualifications reported to HESA for each reporting period. Response rates for the DLHE survey are generally around 80% for NI HEIs. The figures in the tables are therefore displayed as proportions as the actual number of graduates in each activity is unknown.
23. The figures above include graduates from both postgraduate and undergraduate courses.
24. Medical graduates include those students who studied clinical medicine or pre-clinical medicine courses.
25. Work includes those in full-time work only, part-time work only, voluntary or unpaid work and those combining work and further study.
26. 'Other destinations' include those not seeking employment, further study or training.
27. Table (ii) above only includes those for whom type of contract was known.
28. 'Other contract types' include fixed-term contracts shorter than 12 months, self-employed/freelance, temporarily through an agency and temporarily other than through an agency.
29. The latest year for which destinations data are available is 2009/10.

Surplus Land or Buildings

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the surplus land or buildings that his Department is currently considering to sell.

(AQW 8362/11-15)

Dr Farry: The only land or property owned by my Department is Felden House, Newtownabbey, which had been used by the Northern Regional College until new accommodation was constructed at its main campus. The college vacated Felden in March 2011, at which time it became surplus. A Public Sector Trawl was issued and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive is expressing an interest. It is anticipated that the property will be sold in the financial year 2012-13.

Nursing Graduates: Employment

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many nursing graduates were unable to secure permanent jobs in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8435/11-15)

Dr Farry: Information on the destinations of students is obtained from a survey carried out six months after graduation. As this information is derived from a survey rather than a census of the whole population, the figures in the tables below are displayed as percentages rather than numbers.

The tables below display (i) the destinations of nursing graduates and (ii) the type of contract obtained by those nursing graduates in work. The tables provide details for each of the last five academic years for which data are available.

- (i) Destinations of nursing graduates from Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions six months after graduation

Destinations	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Work	94%	97%	95%	97%	94%
Further Study	3%	1%	1%	0%	1%
Unemployed	0%	0%	2%	1%	2%
Other destinations	2%	1%	2%	2%	3%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

- (ii) Type of contract obtained by nursing graduates from Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions who are in work six months after graduation.

Contract Type	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Permanent or open ended	96%	88%	84%	84%	84%
Fixed term: 12 months or longer	2%	4%	5%	3%	3%
Other contract types	2%	8%	12%	13%	12%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency

Notes:

30. The figures in the above tables are derived from the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey. The DLHE survey is issued to all students whose study was full-time or part-time and who obtained relevant qualifications reported to HESA for each reporting period. Response rates for the DLHE survey are generally around 80% for NI HEIs. The figures in the tables are therefore displayed as proportions as the actual number of graduates in each activity is unknown.
31. The figures above include graduates from both postgraduate and undergraduate courses.
32. Work includes those in full-time work only, part-time work only, voluntary or unpaid work and those combining work and further study.
33. 'Other destinations' include those not seeking employment, further study or training.
34. Table (ii) above only includes those for whom type of contract was known.
35. 'Other contract types' include fixed-term contracts shorter than 12 months, self-employed/freelance, temporarily through an agency and temporarily other than through an agency.
36. The latest year for which destinations data are available is 2009/10.

Certificate of Religious Education

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 7001/11-15, for an estimate of the savings that could be made if students of Stranmillis University College were able to access the Catholic Certificate of Religious Education at St Mary's University College.

(AQW 8516/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have provided the costs incurred over the last six years by Stranmillis University College in reimbursing students taking the Certificate in Religious Education at Glasgow University in AQW 7001/11-15. The Department has no estimate of the level of administrative and other costs associated with the establishing and running of such a facility were St Mary's to offer it.

Postage and Printing Costs

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether his Department, and its arm's-length bodies, give elected representatives the choice of receiving reports and all other correspondence by email to minimise postage and printing costs.

(AQW 8525/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department's green policy actively promotes electronic distribution of information for both internal and external communications, where possible. This approach is generally echoed in the arm's length bodies. Elected representatives normally receive a hard copy of Ministerial correspondence in addition to any e-mailed response, however, unless an electronic response has been specifically requested.

Apprenticeships

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many apprenticeships have been created in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8601/11-15)

Dr Farry: The ApprenticeshipsNI programme is an employer-led provision and, as such, it is employers and not my Department that create apprenticeship positions. The following data provides ApprenticeshipsNI occupancy figures in each of the last five years.

At 31st December 2007	7,281
At 31st December 2008	9,872
At 31st December 2009	10,681
At 31st December 2010	10,522
At 31st December 2011	11,916

Hospitality Sector: Skills

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what emphasis his Department is placing on the development of skills for the hospitality sector.

(AQO 1388/11-15)

Dr Farry: Over the next two years, Northern Ireland will host an impressive series of events, celebrations and the launch of many exciting new visitor attractions. These events offer Northern Ireland an opportunity to showcase what our region has to offer.

I recognise the opportunities for the Tourism and Hospitality industry over this period and am determined to make the most of them to provide employment for the local labour market and to boost the local economy. Obviously the skills of staff are fundamental to success. Consequently, I have designated tourism and hospitality as a priority area.

In addition, my Department's Skills Solutions Team has been working with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and People 1st, the Sector Skills Council for hospitality. They have developed and put in place a customised training programme for customer service known as WorldHost. In this financial year I have allocated £255,000 to assist 1500 staff in hospitality and tourism to achieve this level 2 qualification and have committed to finance for future training of staff over the next two years.

We are delighted that the North Coast will host the Irish Open later this year and, in anticipation of this, my officials have developed a further short training programme with the Northern Regional College to assist the hospitality and tourism sector in this area to up-skill their staff.

My Department has recognised the importance of tourism to Northern Ireland and has, for some time, been working with People First, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and the colleges through a Future Skills Action Group. This put in place specific provision aimed at addressing skills issues within the sector, including the Fast Track Chef Conversion Course and the ThinkTourismNI resource for teachers. The additional initiatives which I have instigated build on this good platform.

Academic Underachievement

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the measures his Department is taking to tackle academic under-achievement in socially deprived areas.

(AQO 1393/11-15)

Dr Farry: Addressing the underachievement of children in schools is the responsibility of the Minister of Education. However, my Department's Success through Skills Strategy – 'Transforming Futures'

outlines measures that are in place to raise the qualification levels of the workforce and to address underachievement across Northern Ireland.

Level 2, the equivalent of 5 GCSEs at A* - C, is the benchmark for the workplace. While I recognise the work that the Department of Education is doing to improve standards, too many young people leave school without 5 GCSEs including English and maths. I have, therefore, set very challenging targets to increase the proportion of people in employment with qualifications and skills at level 2 and above from around 71% in 2008 to 90% by 2020. Many adults also have significant weaknesses in literacy and numeracy.

In order to address underachievement and help individuals achieve their potential, my Department funds an extensive range of programmes through further education and work-based learning.

Further education has a vital role to play in helping people gain at least a level 2 qualification and around 24% of all the enrolments in further education are from the 20% most deprived areas in N. Ireland.

The Department also provides a guarantee of a training place through the Training for Success programme for unemployed 16 and 17 year olds, with extended eligibility for those with a disability or in care.

Essential Skills provision is embedded across all my Department's programmes, and over 133,000 Essential Skills qualifications have been achieved by almost 74,000 individuals. It is encouraging that 30% of enrolments are from the 20% most deprived areas in Northern Ireland.

Finally, I am very aware that some young people have not engaged in education, employment or training, and in April I plan to bring a cross-departmental strategy to the Executive to address this issue.

Queen's University Belfast and Stranmillis University College: Proposed Merger

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, following the suspension of talks and negotiations around the merger of Stranmillis University College and Queen's University, Belfast, whether he can confirm that all payments for these talks and negotiations have been discontinued from the date of the suspension of the talks.

(AQO 1394/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have commissioned a two-stage study of the teacher education infrastructure in Northern Ireland. The first stage of this will complete in the spring, and the second stage by the autumn of this year. Other than the costs associated with this study, my Department is not incurring any direct expenditure on the merger.

Investors in People: East Londonderry

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many small and medium sized enterprises in the East Londonderry Constituency applied for the Investor in People accreditation in 2010.

(AQO 1395/11-15)

Dr Farry: Information on Investors in People is not collected by Assembly or parliamentary constituency. However, the Northern Ireland Investors in People Delivery Centre carried out an exercise to provide this information by mapping their data to East Londonderry constituency postcodes.

That exercise showed that during 2010 two small and medium sized enterprises in the East Londonderry Constituency committed to and achieved Investors in People recognition. One other small and medium sized enterprise committed to Investors in People during 2010 and subsequently achieved recognition in 2011. A fourth, public sector organisation committed to and achieved Investors in People recognition in 2010.

Tourism and Hospitality: Vocational Courses

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what assessment has been made of the provision of vocational and academic courses available to young people seeking employment in the tourism and hospitality sector.

(AQO 1396/11-15)

Dr Farry: I am keenly aware of the importance of the hospitality and tourism sector to Northern Ireland especially, as over the next two years, we will host an impressive range of events and celebrations, including the launch of exciting new visitor attractions. Having a well skilled workforce is key to the success of these events. Consequently I have made this sector a priority within my Department.

In 2010/11, there were 5,479 enrolments on professional and technical courses relevant to hospitality and tourism in further education. In addition, in the hospitality and catering sectors, there are currently 1,624 apprentices and 138 programme-led apprenticeship programmes following the relevant areas. In the same year, there were 445 enrolments in the higher education sector.

In addition, my Department's Skills Solutions Team has been working with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and People 1st, the Sector Skills Council for hospitality. They have developed and put in place a customised training programme for customer service known as WorldHost. In this financial year I have allocated £255,000 to assist 1500 staff in hospitality and tourism to achieve this level 2 qualification and have committed to finance for future training of staff over the next two years.

My Department has recognised the importance of tourism to Northern Ireland and has, for some time, been working with People First, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and the colleges through a Future Skills Action Group. This put in place specific provision aimed at addressing skills issues within the sector, including the Fast Track Chef Conversion Course and the ThinkTourismNI resource for teachers.

Universities: Applications

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in light of the recent figures released for UCAS applications, what action his Department is taking to address the fall in applications from Northern Ireland students to universities in the UK.

(AQO 1397/11-15)

Dr Farry: The recent figures released by UCAS indicate that the total number of Northern Ireland domiciled applicants to higher education institutions in the United Kingdom has decreased by 4.4% when compared to the number of applicants at the same point in the previous year. Most of this reduction is associated with application to universities in Great Britain. There was only a 1.5% reduction in application to Northern Ireland's universities which is broadly in line with the 1% reduction in the 18 year old population between 2010 and 2011. These statistics provide an interesting overview of the latest position but it should be noted that the full picture in relation to applicants will not be available until after the final deadline of 30 June 2012. Furthermore, the information on accepted applicants will not be available until December 2012.

I had anticipated that the changes to the fees regimes across the United Kingdom might lead to a reduction in applications to universities in Great Britain and increased demand from local students to remain at home. Therefore I negotiated for additional funding to enable an expansion of places. I have recently announced that around 700 additional student places will be made available in Northern Ireland by 2015.

My officials will continue to monitor the relevant application and enrolment statistics and consider their implications once the new regime settles across the UK.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he can confirm that the Education Maintenance Allowance scheme will be retained and directed more towards young people in greatest need.

(AQO 1398/11-15)

Dr Farry: Both my Department and the Department of Education are committed to the retention of the Education Maintenance Allowance scheme.

It is clear, however, that the funding needs to be better targeted. Findings from the joint review of the Education Maintenance Allowance scheme in Northern Ireland by my Department and the Department of Education highlighted that the scheme is not as effectively targeted as it could be because a majority of Education Maintenance Allowance students indicated that they would have remained in education even if they had not received Education Maintenance Allowance.

However, in some cases it makes a real difference. I am determined that young people from lower income families, for whom these allowances make a real difference, continue to be assisted to stay in education and training. I would, however, agree with the Employment and Learning Committee's recommendation that the allowances could be better targeted.

My Department and the Department of Education are currently considering a range of options for the future of the scheme.

Once joint Ministerial agreement has been secured on the options to be taken forward, it is intended that these options will be presented to the Executive as soon as practically possible and this will be followed by a public consultation.

Any proposals to change the current provision of the Education Maintenance Allowance scheme in Northern Ireland will also be subject to the appropriate equality considerations.

South Eastern Regional College: Applications

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many applications were received for courses at the South Eastern Regional College in each of the last three academic years.

(AQO 1399/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department does not hold the information requested by the Member, as the number of applications received for courses is a matter for individual colleges.

I have passed this query to the Director of the South Eastern Regional College to respond to the Member directly.

Queen's University Belfast and Stranmillis University College: Proposed Merger

Ms Lewis asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the negotiations surrounding the merger of Stranmillis University College and Queen's University, Belfast.

(AQO 1400/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have commissioned a two-stage study of the teacher education infrastructure in Northern Ireland. The first stage of this will complete in the spring, and the second stage by the autumn of this year. Other than the costs associated with this study, my Department is not incurring any direct expenditure on the merger.

South West Regional College: Beacon Awards

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the South West Regional College's success in receiving three awards at the Association of Colleges Beacon Awards ceremony in Westminster on 8 February 2012.

(AQO 1401/11-15)

Dr Farry: I was delighted to attend and speak at the South West College's recent Celebration event on 22nd February, at which I extended my warmest congratulations on winning three UK Beacon Awards. The college received 2 awards for its effective Engagement with Employers and successful College and School partnerships, and the highly coveted President's Award, in recognition of the STEM Centre's innovative, collaborative work.

The achievement of these prestigious accolades has placed the college on the world stage, in terms of innovative methods of working within further education.

“Further Education Means Business”, my Department’s Strategy for the Northern Ireland further education sector, articulates that “further education should be at the heart of lifelong learning, in order to strengthen economic development, enhance social inclusion, and advance the individual’s skills and learning” - these accolades are a testament to the strategy’s successful implementation by colleges.

My Department has played its part, through the Employer Support Pilot Programme, which provided the financial support for the South West College’s InnoTech and STEM Centres, and the sector’s Carbon Zero NI project.

I have recently approved further funding of over £6 million for the further education sector, through the Employer Support Programme, for the next 4 years. This funding will enable colleges to provide a wide range of support for local employers, through sectoral initiatives and projects, to encourage local businesses to engage with, and embrace innovation.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Go For It Programme

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why her Department is still advertising the Go For It programme; and what action she is taking to address the misleading information about the programme on the Go For It website.

(AQW 6996/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Invest NI is not currently advertising the Go For It programme due to the legal challenge from Enterprise Northern Ireland which prevents Invest NI from providing a business start programme.

The wider Go for It campaign aims to encourage more people to think about starting a business (including those from under-represented groups), inform them of the support available to assist their new business venture, provide signposting information to relevant support and make starting a business a real and viable possibility for potential entrepreneurs.

Invest NI considers that the promotion of this key entrepreneurial message remains valid and important in the current economic climate.

To ensure that those individuals with an interest in establishing their own business are able to access relevant advice and guidance, Invest NI is providing an interim service, delivered through Invest NI’s five Regional Offices (Ballymena, Belfast, Londonderry, Omagh and Newry) by using existing staff already providing advice and guidance to businesses. The interim service may be accessed through the Go For It Helpline on 0800 027639, www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk and the www.goforitni.com websites. The service also refers individuals to Councils, LEAs and other sources of business advice in the area.

There are no specific references to the Go For It programme on the website, other than where they relate to historical case studies.

Electricity Prices

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if she will publish the comparable Northern Ireland, Great Britain average and Republic of Ireland domestic electricity prices for each of the last ten years.

(AQW 7003/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department does not routinely collect comparative data on domestic electricity prices. However, both the Utility Regulator in Northern Ireland and the Department of Energy and Climate Change in GB publish electricity tariff comparison information on their websites.

Warm Homes Discount Scheme

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 3412/11-15, what research has been carried out into the proportion of customers who would benefit from a warm homes discount scheme; and which customers would pay more as a result of such a scheme.

(AQW 7037/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There has been no detailed research carried out in relation to introducing a warm homes discount scheme in Northern Ireland. However, what I can say is that, in Great Britain, the funding for the scheme comes from participating energy suppliers and these costs can be passed directly through to other customers. Given the small size of the domestic customer base in Northern Ireland and the proportion who are already defined as in fuel poverty, these additional costs would have to be borne by an even smaller number of customers and risks pushing more into fuel poverty. I do not think this is either fair or sustainable.

Broadband Access: Rural Areas

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans are in place to ensure that the broadband contracts recently awarded by her Department are availed of by rural dwellers who are currently unable to access broadband.

(AQW 7103/11-15)

Mrs Foster: On 6 January 2012, I announced the award of a contract to deliver high-speed satellite broadband services to Onwave Ltd. The contract ensures that everyone in Northern Ireland continues to have access to broadband services. Onwave delivers services in areas where, due to commercial and technical reasons, broadband cannot be accessed via telephone lines.

Onwave has an extensive marketing strategy to promote its services across Northern Ireland, which includes radio advertising and printed material. I understand that the company has also engaged at a local level through, for example, open days held in Toomebridge on 18 and 19 January 2012, and planned participation in a series of broadband workshops in Fermanagh in February 2012, organised by Fermanagh District Council.

In October 2011, I announced a new investment of £215,432 to improve access to broadband in rural areas across Northern Ireland. The funding was awarded to North West Electronics through the NI Broadband Fund. North West Electronics has developed a marketing strategy to promote its services. I am also aware that the company has had considerable engagement with local representatives and community organisations across Northern Ireland.

Construction Industry

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action she has taken to support and underpin the construction industry; and what progress she has made on the establishment of a taskforce for the construction industry.

(AQW 7107/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The overarching aim of the draft Northern Ireland Economic Strategy is to improve the competitiveness of the Northern Ireland economy through export led economic growth.

In developing the draft Economic Strategy, the Executive Sub-Committee on the Economy have recognised the need to take action to rebuild the local labour market in the aftermath of the recession and the need to include actions which will support the construction industry. The Strategy identifies a number of infrastructure projects which will support the rebuilding of the local labour market by creating employment in the local construction sector.

The Executive believes that a focus on export opportunities will be key to the future performance not only of the NI economy but also of the local construction sector.

In addition to the measures outlined in the draft economic strategy, Invest NI continues to work closely with companies in the sector to explore new market opportunities. This has included a number of 'Meet the Buyer' events focussed on major construction events; projects or sectors where there is still spend anticipated in the coming years and a series of events promoting renewable energy opportunities to the sector. Invest NI have also recruited a new Business Development Director for Construction based in London. This new role will support local construction related companies maximise opportunities within the GB market.

On 17 January I attended the all party working group on construction which had as its focus a discussion on how the construction industry can deliver the Executive's objectives set out in the PfG and Economic Strategy. The construction industry has identified 16 PfG commitments that they can assist the Executive in delivering.

I welcome this initiative by the industry and I will continue to work with my colleagues on the Executive Sub-committee on the Economy to ensure we collectively support the sector.

Winning in Europe: European Priorities 2011-12

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how she is using EU policies, networks and programmes to achieve the key objective to strengthen the targeted research performance and research base to create a stronger push towards knowledge transfer/exchange, as detailed in 'Winning in Europe: European Priorities 2011-12'.

(AQW 7110/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department contributes to the delivery of three of the four Thematic Priorities identified in "Winning in Europe: European Priorities 2011-12". Specific activities undertaken over the period aimed at promoting research commercialisation include:

- Encouraging companies and research bodies to engage more fully with the 7th Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration activities. This has involved supporting the SME sector, Universities and other research bodies to prepare applications and find partners. In the period 31 October 2010 to 31 October 2011, Northern Ireland based researchers (in private companies, academia and other) secured €11.54million from this source.
- Engaging directly with EU counterparts through membership of networks such as the "European Regions Research and Innovation Network" (ERRIN) which facilitates knowledge exchange, joint action and project partnerships between its members with the aim of strengthening their research and innovation capacities.
- Participating in and hosting EU workshops to exchange best practice and identify learning/funding opportunities for Northern Ireland in areas such as Smart Specialisation and Horizon 2020.
- Imminent appointment of additional staff resource based in Brussels, to engage directly with the EU institutions on this agenda and identify new funding opportunities for NI.
- Separately, DEL has put in place a Higher Education EU Framework Support Fund, aimed at providing mentoring support to research institutions for the development of applications to the Framework Programme.

DETI continues to manage drawdown of the €306 million European Regional Development funds available to NI through the Sustainable Competitiveness Programme, 2007-2013. €160million of this is earmarked for R&D and innovation support activities.

Invest NI: Start-up Scheme

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in relation to the start-up scheme being delivered by InvestNI staff, which has been advertised on television under the Go For It brand, (i) to detail the number of (a)Business advisory sessions that were completed; (b) training seminars that were held; (c) the number of attendees at the training seminars; (d) business clinics that were held; (e)

hours of business planning advice; and (f) business start-up plans produced, in October, November and December 2011; and (ii) how this compares with the outputs for the Go for It strand of the Enterprise Development Programme in October, November & December 2010.

(AQW 7401/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI is not delivering a start up scheme in connection with Go For It but is responding to start up enquiries including those generated through the Go For It helpline. It is therefore important to recognise that a useful comparison cannot be made between the Enterprise Development Programme, (a structured programme delivered at a cost of approx £4 million p.a.) and an interim, reactive service that is part of Invest NI's standard response to enquiries.

Invest NI is prevented from delivering a fully functional business start programme as a direct result of the legal action undertaken by Enterprise Northern Ireland.

The following information should be considered in that context. Indeed, the differences in activity levels when not operating such a programme serve to underline the need for such a structured programme approach to business start provision.

As part of Invest NI's core service, through the Regional Office network, staff do provide advice and business plan support. Invest NI is also engaging with other stakeholders providing services in this area including DEL and Princes Trust NI, and where appropriate is signposting individuals to these organisations for support.

In the period October 2011 to December 2011 Invest NI responded to 1878 enquiries, held 24 clinics and met 347 individuals. 91 individuals completed business plans.

In October 2010 to December 2010 the Go For It strand of EDP delivered

- 1093 Business advisory sessions completed
- 394 Training seminars
- 1290 attendees at training seminars
- 69 Business clinics
- 541 hours of business planning advice
- 687 Business Plans
- 1391 hours of Financial business planning

Invest NI: Start-up Scheme

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many InvestNI staff are currently working on the delivery of the start-up scheme advertised under the Go For It brand.

(AQW 7402/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI's wider Go for It campaign is not advertising, nor delivering a specific start up scheme, but aims to encourage more people to think about starting a business (including those from under-represented groups), inform them of the support available to assist their new business venture, provide signposting information to relevant support and make starting a business a real and viable possibility for potential entrepreneurs.

Those individuals with an interest in establishing their own business are able to access relevant advice and guidance through staff based within Invest NI's five Regional Offices (Ballymena, Belfast, Londonderry, Omagh and Newry). These offices are staffed by approximately 30 business-facing staff who provide a range of services to local businesses as part of a wider role, including advice on business start, business growth, and access to an extensive network of support. This wider role includes some elements of the Go For It campaign.

Tourism Ireland: Funding

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) for her assessment of whether the tourism sector receives equitable treatment and benefit from Tourism Ireland Limited compared with

the tourism sector in the Republic of Ireland; and (ii) to detail the level of funding her Department has received from Tourism Ireland Limited in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8030/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

- (i) I am content currently that Northern Ireland receives equitable treatment and benefit from Tourism Ireland.
- (ii) Core funding received by Tourism Ireland from DETI in each of the last 3 years:

2010/11	£14.572million*
2009/10	£15.732million*
2008/09	£15.502million **

*excludes pension costs

** includes pension costs

Sectarian Harassment Cases

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the impact that the handling of sectarian harassment cases by major companies may have on the reputation of local business and potential investment.

(AQW 8078/11-15)

Mrs Foster: No assessment has been made.

‘NI 2012: Our Place, Our Time’

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much was spent on advertising ‘NI 2012: Our Place Our Time’ in (i) Northern Ireland; (ii) the Republic of Ireland; and (iii) the rest of the world.

(AQW 8081/11-15)

Mrs Foster: NITB, which has responsibility for marketing Northern Ireland in the domestic market and the Republic of Ireland, has spent

- (i) £424,000 advertising “ni2012 our Time our place in the Northern Ireland market and
- (ii) £712,000 on marketing the initiative in the Republic of Ireland.
- (iii) Tourism Ireland, which markets Northern Ireland worldwide, will have spent £4.7m by the end of this financial year marketing this initiative with the majority of the money being spent in Great Britain, our most important market. This commitment also includes £1m which has been spent on co-operative marketing campaigns with air and sea carriers.

Bed and Breakfasts: Incentives

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what incentives are in place for prospective owners who wish to open a bed and breakfast establishment.

(AQW 8092/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Whilst Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) does not offer any financial incentives for potential B&B accommodation providers, there is a range of advisory and support services available. These include guidance on the legal requirements involved when opening a B&B, operational matters, signage and advice on other statutory bodies’ legislative requirements i.e. Environmental Health and Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service.

B&B providers can also avail of free marketing via NITB’s consumer website www.discovernorthernireland.com and can also apply to participate in the quality grading scheme offering the opportunity to be star graded.

They will have access to NITB's Next Level Programme of Events which includes road shows, master classes, business insights and conferences. In addition, a range of ICT business support and customer service initiatives are also available to certified B&B providers.

NITB also works closely with the Accommodation Associations, including the Northern Ireland Bed & Breakfast Partnership, who can provide further guidance to potential B&B operators.

While support may be available for the establishment of a guesthouse, Invest NI does not provide financial support for new start B&B businesses.

Financial assistance may be available from other government bodies such as the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Shale Gas

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given her assurances that the extraction of shale gas will result in lower energy prices for consumers, for her assessment of how much lower gas prices would be for consumers, based on Tamboran's most optimistic supply estimate, at the current rate of consumption.

(AQW 8116/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Tamboran's recent announcement that initial studies have confirmed the presence of a substantial natural gas field in Co. Fermanagh has the potential to improve security of energy supply in Northern Ireland which is one of my Department's key energy priorities. Two out of our local three power stations are gas fired and both the business and domestic market for natural gas in Northern Ireland is increasing.

I am aware that significant shale gas finds in the United States have resulted in lower gas prices for US consumers. However, it is not yet possible to accurately predict to what degree the extraction of shale gas will result in lower energy prices for local consumers.

Invest NI: Go For It Programme

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much was spent on advertising InvestNI's 'Go for It' programme from October 2011 to January 2012; and how many people or companies accessed the programme during this period.

(AQW 8130/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest Northern Ireland (Invest NI) is not currently advertising a Business Start programme due to the legal challenge from Enterprise Northern Ireland (ENI), which prevents Invest NI from providing such a programme. However, Invest NI continues to advertise under the wider "Go For It" brand to stimulate public interest in enterprise, entrepreneurship and business start.

Invest NI responds directly to all enquiries generated as a result of the wider "Go For It" campaign. This helps ensure those individuals with an interest in establishing or growing their own business are able to access relevant advice and guidance, Invest NI provides advice and signposting through its five Regional Offices (Ballymena, Belfast, Londonderry, Omagh and Newry), using existing staff that would already be providing advice and guidance to businesses.

Invest NI is also engaging with other stakeholders, providing services in this area including the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) and Princes Trust NI, and where appropriate, signposting individuals needing additional support to these organisations, as well as Councils, Local Enterprise Agencies and other sources of business advice in the area.

During the period from 1 October 2011 to 31 January 2012, Invest NI responded to 2,572 enquiries, held 49 business clinics and met with 390 individuals, which in turn resulted in 167 completed business plans.

Advertising spend on the "Go For It" campaign from 1 October 2011 to 31 January 2012 has been £187,401 (inc. of VAT).

Fracking: Chemical Use

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given her assertions in answer to previous Assembly Questions that Tamboran will not use any chemicals as part of the fracking process, whether (i) this commitment applies to the entire drilling and fracking process or just the fracturing of rocks; (ii) she has sought any assurances in writing from Tamboran in this regard; (iii) such a commitment is now part of Tamboran's licence; and (iv) any commitment of this nature from Tamboran would remain applicable in the event that Tamboran, or the licence, were to be taken over by an alternative company.

(AQW 8147/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

- (i) Tamboran have repeatedly stated that they do not intend to use any chemical additives during hydraulic fracturing. It is highly probable that the shallow section of any well (through the limestone formations) would be drilled using air and that at least some of the lower section would be drilled using a standard oil industry drilling mud.
- (ii) & (ii) The company's proposals for drilling are still far from finalised and consequently my Department has not either sought any written assurances or made this commitment a condition of the licence.
- (iv) As Tamboran's commitment not to use chemical additives during hydraulic fracturing has not yet been formalised by inclusion in a drilling application, the transfer of such a commitment to either a new owner or new licensee is hypothetical.

Any approval for activities undertaken under a petroleum licence would relate to the application submitted for that activity. Change of ownership would not affect this, although any new Operator would have to demonstrate both their capability and their commitment to carry out the activities as authorised.

Shale Gas Forum

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) to detail the membership of the recently constituted shale gas forum; (ii) to which organisation each member belongs; (iii) to outline the expertise in gas exploration, hydraulic fracturing, environmental protection, the agri-food sector or the tourism industry that each member brings to the forum; (iv) to detail the terms of reference of the forum; (v) to whom the forum provides advice or assistance; (vi) how often the forum has met to date; and (vii) to list the dates for any future meetings.

(AQW 8148/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The shale gas 'forum' is an informal mechanism which allows officials from the main agencies with a role in regulating shale gas in Northern Ireland to meet to share knowledge on shale gas and improve communications to facilitate co-ordinated regulation. Participants have included representatives from my Department (Minerals & Petroleum Branch, Geological Survey of Northern Ireland, Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland), Northern Ireland Environment Agency (Environmental policy, Water management), Planning Service, DARD (Environmental Policy, Inland Fisheries) and NI Water. This includes both technical and policy representation. The purpose of this group, which has no formal terms of reference, is to consider the regulatory regime relating to shale gas exploration in Northern Ireland to ensure that all aspects of environmental protection, planning and public health and safety are fully covered, with reference both to previous experience worldwide and to specific local conditions. There have been two meetings of the forum to date; the dates for future meetings have not been finalised.

Shale Gas: County Fermanagh

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, based on the figures released recently by Tamboran regarding the potential amount of shale gas in Co Fermanagh, to detail (i) the estimated total value of the gas at the current market price, should the estimated amount of shale gas

be extracted; (ii) how much would be paid in royalties to the Treasury; and (iii) how much the Executive would be paid directly from Tamboran.

(AQW 8149/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has not yet studied the analysis supporting Tamboran's recently published figures of recoverable reserves of shale gas in Fermanagh and, therefore, it is not appropriate to make such estimates at this time. Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs is responsible for oil taxation in the UK. Royalties, levied at 7.5% of the value of gas produced, may be subject to claims from the former owners of the mineral rights of the ground surrounding the production wells. Any unclaimed royalties are passed to the H.M. Treasury.

Fuel: Regional Pricing

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department has had any discussions with the large supermarket chains or the major fuel providers in relation to regional pricing of fuel.

(AQW 8151/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Retail prices for a range of filling station products, including petrol and diesel, are outside the control of my Department. The retail price of road fuels respond to fluctuating wholesale prices that are set internationally. Additionally, fuel duty and tax, which accounts for around 60% of the final pump price, is set by Her Majesty's Treasury.

Emigration: 2010/2011/2012

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many people emigrated in (i) 2010; (ii) 2011; and (iii) 2012 to date; and how this is reflected in unemployment figures.

(AQW 8182/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Parts (i), (ii) & (iii)

Migration statistics for Northern Ireland are produced by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research agency (NISRA). The table below shows the latest available estimates of immigration, emigration and net in migration into Northern Ireland in the period July 2003 to June 2010.

TABLE 1: NORTHERN IRELAND MIGRATION STATISTICS

	Immigration	Emigration	Net In migration
Jul 2003 - Jun 2004	20,304	19,483	821
Jul 2004 - Jun 2005	26,901	20,230	6,671
Jul 2005 - Jun 2006	30,522	20,627	9,895
Jul 2006 - Jun 2007	32,266	22,460	9,806
Jul 2007 - Jun 2008	27,484	21,741	5,743
Jul 2008 - Jun 2009	23,547	21,427	2,120
Jul 2009 - Jun 2010	22,521	22,541	-20

Source: Migration Statistics, NISRA

Further information on migration is publically available at <http://www.nisra.gov.uk/demography/default.asp18.htm>.

Part (iv)

The figures on the number of people claiming unemployment related benefits, over broadly the same period, are presented in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2: NUMBER OF PEOPLE CLAIMING UNEMPLOYMENT RELATED BENEFITS

	Claimant Count
Jul 2003	34,600
Jul 2004	29,900
Jul 2005	28,600
Jul 2006	28,000
Jul 2007	23,700
Jul 2008	26,900
Jul 2009	51,000
Jul 2010	56,600
Jul 2011	60,300
Jan 2012	61,500

Source: Claimant Count, NISRA

Care should be taken to avoid establishing fixed relationships between one particular factor and any change in unemployment – there are a range of factors which influence unemployment. For example, the unemployment level in Northern Ireland could be affected by residents of the Republic of Ireland taking up jobs in Northern Ireland, and vice versa; and people who were previously inactive taking up employment (for example a graduate, a school leaver or perhaps a parent returning from a career break). Job creation rates and people losing their jobs will also affect the overall unemployment level. Clearly inwards and outwards migration could also impact on unemployment but it would be very difficult to isolate this one issue from all the other factors at play.

Energy Prices: Affordability

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of recent increases in energy prices and the publication of the Consumer Council's analysis of the McIlldoon report, how she, and the Utility Regulator, will ensure that energy policy coherently examines the issues of energy affordability, security of supply and sustainability.

(AQW 8209/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Strategic Energy Framework (SEF 2010) set out four key goals namely, building competitive markets, ensuring security of supply, enhancing sustainability and developing our energy infrastructure. The SEF, which has a ten year life span, also identified a number of actions aimed at delivering against these key goals and progress against these is monitored on a regular basis.

Energy Prices: Tariffs

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of recent increases in energy prices and the publication of the Consumer Council's recent analysis of the McIlldoon report, how she, and the Utility Regulator, will ensure that energy consumers are empowered and provided with price tariff structures that meet their needs, so that they can influence the type of energy they use, and how and when it is used.

(AQW 8278/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department and the Utility Regulator have helped put in place the conditions necessary for effective competition in the Northern Ireland energy market, and removed the barriers to market entry. The Utility Regulator also ensures that regulated tariffs are "cost reflective".

In the last two years three new electricity supply companies have begun offering domestic electricity supply, and firmus energy has begun offering supply to domestic gas customers in the Greater Belfast licensed area. The new suppliers have been offering discounted tariffs compared to the incumbent suppliers. All energy consumers are encouraged to seek out the best deals available from competing supply companies, and business customers are encouraged to use the energy buyers' guides which have been produced by the Utility Regulator and Manufacturing NI.

Energy Prices: Incentives/Penalties

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of recent increases in energy prices and the publication of the Consumer Council's recent analysis of the McIlDoon report, how she, and the Utility Regulator, will ensure that mechanisms are put in place to provide greater incentives, or penalties, for energy suppliers to supply consumers at the optimum price.

(AQW 8283/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Utility Regulator price regulates the gas and electricity retail markets for domestic consumers in Northern Ireland. This ensures that dominant suppliers cannot abuse their market power and that only efficient costs are passed onto consumers.

Increasing competition, particularly in the domestic energy supply market, is also helping to put downward pressure on prices and has led to competing companies offering discounted tariffs to consumers.

Invest NI: Job Promotion

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of (i) jobs promoted by InvestNI; (ii) business start-ups created by InvestNI; and (iii) overseas companies attracted by InvestNI in each year between 2001 and 2011, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 8327/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As Invest NI was only established in 2002, the information contained in this answer relates to the financial years 2002-03 to 2010-11.

- (i) Table 1 shows the number of jobs promoted by Invest NI between 2002-03 and 2010-11 broken down by Parliamentary Constituency Area (PCA).

TABLE 1: JOBS PROMOTED BY INVEST NI BY PCA (2002-03 TO 2010-11)

PCA	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Belfast East	0	0	429	329	678	304	1,089	396	925
Belfast North	0	14	17	113	91	51	117	472	66
Belfast South	134	720	1,317	969	966	527	358	642	703
Belfast West	0	122	750	31	58	178	92	46	5
East Antrim	100	25	112	232	69	284	42	53	222
East Londonderry	0	24	0	51	56	389	58	73	63
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	350	202	0	129	722	250	397	149	198
Foyle	43	486	40	668	875	994	217	265	365
Lagan Valley	0	0	16	387	143	107	102	186	251
Mid Ulster	32	0	149	118	270	398	356	228	177

PCA	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Newry & Armagh	25	0	0	633	424	427	928	135	613
North Antrim	0	0	23	98	246	95	191	42	106
North Down	41	200	140	56	255	60	91	172	25
South Antrim	5	0	304	141	48	65	212	134	715
South Down	0	0	0	275	93	61	569	148	115
Strangford	70	5	0	120	86	61	134	137	33
Upper Bann	16	110	13	298	147	102	269	713	116
West Tyrone	0	175	53	124	116	199	71	106	70
Not Yet Located	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20	545
Total	816	2,083	3,363	4,772	5,343	4,552	5,293	4,113	5,312

Notes:

1. The years 2002-03 to 2004-05 include external jobs only. Local job figures for the period 2002-03 to 2004-05 are not available; however, Invest NI estimates that almost 7,000 additional local jobs were promoted during this time (not included in the table above).
2. Invest NI revises performance data on a regular basis to ensure that it reflects implemented projects; therefore, the data above may differ to previously published information.

(ii) Table 2 shows the number of local business start ups approved by Invest NI between 2002-03 and 2010-11 by PCA.

TABLE 2: NUMBER OF LOCAL BUSINESS START UPS APPROVED BY INVEST NI BY PCA (2002-03 TO 2010-11)

PCA	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Belfast East	61	109	128	106	101	142	116	102	162
Belfast North	71	93	115	145	95	132	108	135	178
Belfast South	94	150	206	148	138	153	132	134	214
Belfast West	79	98	158	148	134	146	106	105	131
East Antrim	113	143	212	162	175	163	107	97	116
East Londonderry	115	149	266	219	200	248	168	149	236
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	149	220	340	292	303	337	247	220	253
Foyle	129	196	330	233	212	273	168	135	152
Lagan Valley	123	110	145	149	136	131	90	98	158
Mid Ulster	181	219	270	278	233	283	182	212	322
Newry & Armagh	158	185	288	230	189	234	154	145	201
North Antrim	113	108	199	173	204	236	137	87	140
North Down	90	157	160	145	112	98	86	57	118

PCA	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
South Antrim	100	132	161	148	132	131	100	93	149
South Down	165	213	305	286	173	218	135	134	179
Strangford	108	160	190	180	132	120	80	72	126
Upper Bann	143	174	238	228	140	181	158	120	167
West Tyrone	103	133	187	194	203	252	186	191	238
Not Yet Located								5	11
Total	2,095	2,749	3,898	3,464	3,012	3,478	2,460	2,291	3,251

Notes:

- 3 Figures include 25,684 start ups delivered indirectly in partnership with Enterprise NI through the Enterprise Development Programme (formerly Start A Business).
- 4 Invest NI revises performance data on a regular basis to ensure that it reflects implemented projects; therefore, the data above may differ to previously published information.

(iii) Table 3 shows the number of new externally-owned businesses that were attracted (had an offer of support approved) by Invest NI between 2002-03 and 2010-11 by PCA.

TABLE 3: NUMBER OF NEW EXTERNALLY-OWNED BUSINESSES SUPPORTED BY INVEST NI BY PCA (2002-03 TO 2010-11)

Pca	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Belfast East		1	3	2	2	1	4	5	2
Belfast North		1	1	1	1		1	4	1
Belfast South	3	1	6	1	4	4	4	3	4
Belfast West		2	1					1	
East Antrim	2		1	1			1		1
East Londonderry									
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	1				3	2	3	1	1
Foyle		1		1	2			1	1
Lagan Valley							1	1	
Mid Ulster	1	2	2					1	
Newry & Armagh					1	1	2	1	
North Antrim								1	
North Down	1								
South Down								1	
Strangford							1	1	

Pca	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Upper Bann				1		1	1		1
West Tyrone				1		1			1
Not Yet Located								1	4
Total	8	8	14	8	13	10	18	22	16

Notes:

- 5 A company can only be counted once in this table. For example, a new investor during the period that also undertakes an expansion project is only counted as one company.
- 6 Invest NI revises performance data on a regular basis to ensure that it reflects implemented projects; therefore, the data above may differ to previously published information.

In addition, Invest NI attracted reinvestment projects from 222 externally-owned businesses already established in Northern Ireland during the period under review.

North/South Electricity Interconnector

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the benefits of the proposed North-South electricity interconnector to the economy.

(AQW 8355/11-15)

Mrs Foster: A new interconnector will remove transmission capacity constraints that are costing consumers in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland some £18- £25 million a year. Currently, more expensive plant must be run than would otherwise be the case due to lack of capacity. To promote competition effectively it is important that suppliers can access electricity from the most efficient power plants. This will help drive down the cost of electricity for consumers and support economic growth; increase system resilience, support the growth of renewable electricity and help meet the target of 40% of electricity from renewable generation.

Strategic Energy Framework

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the implementation of the recommendation contained in the Strategic Energy Framework on smart energy metering.

(AQW 8374/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I refer you to my answer of 9 February 2012 to AQW 7065/11-15.

Broadband Speed

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what is the average broadband speed for (i) households; and (ii) businesses in each council area.

(AQW 8400/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department does not hold information of this nature. In July 2011 OFCOM produced its first Communications Infrastructure Report in which it included an assessment of broadband speeds across each of the UK Council areas. Following publication of the report I wrote to OFCOM expressing my disappointment that the analysis failed to take into consideration the impact of the £51m fibre to the cabinet investment in Northern Ireland. OFCOM indicated that when updating the report in January 2012 this issue would be addressed. However the updated report again fails to recognise the impact of the investment. My officials have been in contact with OFCOM to express ongoing dissatisfaction with this analysis. The OFCOM Infrastructure Report can be accessed at http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/broadband-research/Fixed_Broadband_June_2011.pdf

North/South Electricity Interconnector

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the proposed North-South electricity interconnector will improve the security of electricity supply to consumers and businesses.
(AQW 8407/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Interconnection plays a crucial role in supply security for the economy, especially for the manufacturing and IT sectors which rely on a constant electricity supply. The new second interconnector will greatly improve system resilience if either interconnector fails.

The importance of adequate interconnection for security of supply is shown by the latest forecast of electricity generation capacity. This shows that nearly 23% of Northern Ireland's conventional generation will be lost due to plant being decommissioned by 2016 at Ballylumford to meet EU environmental constraints under the Heavy Fuel Oil Directive.

Economic Activity: Derry

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 7055/11-15, in light of the latest figures which rank Derry as the District Council Area with the highest level of unemployment, what specific plans she has to increase economic activity in Derry.
(AQW 8409/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As I have outlined previously, my Department and Invest NI continues to work on a number of initiatives and programmes which will contribute to increasing employment in the Londonderry area and beyond.

These initiatives include the Jobs Fund where support for projects already approved such as Axa Insurance and One Stop Data will lead to the creation of over 140 jobs in the City. A number of other projects are currently at varying stages of negotiation and I am confident that there will be further positive job announcements in the near future.

Invest NI also continues to work in close collaboration with other key stakeholders including Londonderry City Council to optimise opportunities for economic growth. This will include seeking to capitalise on the city's status as UK City of Culture in 2013, particularly in terms of attracting new inward investment and associated employment opportunities to the city and wider North West region.

Invest NI: Go For It Programme

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to confirm that (i) the Go For It initiative was a business start-up programme; (ii) InvestNI terminated the Go For It programme on 30 September 2011; (iii) the programme allowed for two 1 year extensions to the contract which meant that it could have continued until 31 March 2013; and (iv) InvestNI was not prevented from delivering the programme due to the current legal challenge by Enterprise Northern Ireland, and that it could have continued to deliver the programme during the legal challenge period.
(AQW 8416/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI's Go For It campaign is a wider initiative that aims to encourage more people to think about starting a business (including those from under-represented groups), inform them of the support available to assist their new business venture, provide signposting information to relevant support and make starting a business a real and viable possibility for potential entrepreneurs.

Invest NI's Go For It campaign is not a programme and did not terminate on 30th September 2011.

We assume from this question that you are referring to the Enterprise Development Programme (EDP). The original contract for the EDP was a two year contract to 31 March 2011 which did allow for two 1 year extensions.

The legal challenge prevents Invest NI from awarding the tender for the new BSP and therefore does prevent Invest NI from running a Business Start up Programme.

Trevor Bailie: Prosecution Costs

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what were the total costs to the Health & Safety Executive in the failed Crown Court prosecution of Trevor Bailie which concluded in or about September 2011; and in respect of a second case which was dropped.

(AQW 8446/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The witness costs associated with taking prosecutions against Trevor Bailie, trading as Trevor Bailie Maintenance and Engineering, following the catastrophic failure of two tower cranes, breaks down as follows: Case 1 – Danesfort, Belfast £29,393.07 and Case 2 – Shane House, Larne £4,568.58. Associated legal fees for both cases have not yet been invoiced but are likely to be in the region of £15,000.

Tourism Strategy: Signature Projects

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 7221/11-15, to detail the nine signature projects identified in the draft Tourism Strategy.

(AQW 8447/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The draft Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020 proposes nine key tourism areas/destinations which are:

- Armagh
- Belfast
- Causeway Coast and Glens
- Fermanagh Lakelands
- Londonderry
- Lough Neagh
- Mournes
- Sperrins & Tyrone
- Strangford Lough

My Department and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board continue to engage in consultations with key stakeholders including local authorities in each of the areas to facilitate the final definition of the key areas and development of destination management plans across Northern Ireland.

Broadband: Speed of Access

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to clarify what percentage of businesses have access to next generation broadband speeds, given that in the Programme for Government Delivery Report 2008-2011, this has been allocated a green light but the report states that the target of 85 percent of businesses having access to next generation broadband speeds has not been achieved.

(AQW 8474/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As indicated elsewhere in the Programme for Government Delivery Report 2008-2011 the contract for the Next Generation Broadband project was awarded in December 2009 and was scheduled for completion by May 2011 when higher speed broadband services would be available to at least 85% of businesses across Northern Ireland. This was achieved on time and on budget. In addition, as a result of the recently announced contract with Onwave at the beginning of January 2012 broadband services of up to 10 Megabits per second are available to all businesses and homes across Northern Ireland.

Civil Service: Posts

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 7691/11-15, and given that Derry has the highest unemployment rate and that the Programme for Government highlights 'recognising the importance of Belfast and Derry as key drivers of regional economic growth', why her Department does not have any civil servants based in Derry; and what plans she has to address this regional disparity.

(AQW 8602/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The answer to AQW 7691/11-15 related only to the specific administrative grades listed in that question. However the Department currently has two Trading Standards Enforcement Officers (equivalent to EOI) based in Londonderry. In addition to this Invest NI has a Regional Office in the City currently employing 16 public service staff. There are currently no plans to change this position.

Shale Gas: County Fermanagh

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) what influence her Department will have on where the shale gas extracted in County Fermanagh will be sold and the price at which it will be sold; (ii) whether customers living on the island of Ireland will be given preference with regards to the purchase of this gas; and (iii) what impact this gas exploration will have on the price consumers here will pay.

(AQW 8617/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The energy industry in Northern Ireland is fully privatised, and the natural gas and electricity sectors are subject to regulation. However, it must be recognised that natural gas is a commodity and, as such, any shale gas extracted in County Fermanagh is likely to be traded in national and international gas markets. While my Department has no direct role in the price at which shale gas might be traded, there are significant security of supply benefits from a source of shale gas in Northern Ireland, which would reduce our dependence on imported gas supplies.

Tourism Strategy: Update

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the Tourism Strategy.

(AQO 1408/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The draft Programme for Government includes a key commitment to grow visitor numbers and revenue in light of the opportunities presented by ni2012 and the investment in tourism product from the last Programme for Government which is now coming to fruition.

The draft Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020 is currently being revised to align it with the draft Programme for Government and the draft Economic Strategy and I aim to seek Executive approval shortly.

Invest NI: Boosting Business Initiative

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what support her Department provides to companies that find themselves in difficult trading conditions.

(AQO 1409/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department and Invest NI are acutely aware of the difficult conditions being faced by our local business base. That is specifically why Invest NI launched the Boosting Business Initiative last year which is designed to support those companies which can continue to trade profitably and remain viable but are being constrained by the current difficult trading conditions.

Invest NI has also reviewed its existing products and services to make them more accessible to eligible businesses and to widen the scope of support to help the wider business base. This range of advice, guidance and support is available under five key themes: Jobs, R&D, Exports, Technology and Skills, and is designed to help businesses survive the impact of the economic downturn and secure their position for the future.

As at week commencing 20th February 2012, Invest NI had fielded approximately 4,300 enquiries from local businesses through its dedicated Boosting Business enquiry centre, generating over 550 projects which have the potential to create approximately 1,000 new jobs and lever £71m investment.

Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the new Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre.

(AQO 1410/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Giant's Causeway Visitor Experience is nearing completion and due to open to the public on 25 June 2012, 2 weeks ahead of schedule, to tie in with the Irish Open tee off on Wednesday 27 June 2012.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board has identified the official opening of the world class Giant's Causeway Visitor Experience as a Tier 1 event within the ni2012: Our Time; Our Place showcase which will be complemented by FLAGS at the Giant's Causeway.

FLAGS is a large scale installation embedded in the dramatic landscape of the Causeway was created by internationally renowned artist Hans Peter Kuhn and will run from August to October 2012 to recognise the world heritage site and new visitor experience.

Credit Easing: Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on her Department's policy on credit easing schemes for small and medium sized enterprises.

(AQO 1411/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In the Autumn Statement, the Chancellor announced that credit easing in the UK would take the form of a £20 billion National Loan Guarantee Scheme which will aim to relieve constraints on the supply of bank lending and tackle the longstanding problems in the supply of finance to SMEs in the UK.

The Executive has previously highlighted the need to make credit available to SMEs and that any steps in this regard are implemented in a way that the benefits are felt in Northern Ireland. Treasury has confirmed that they are currently consulting with all UK bank headquarters, including the main banks in Northern Ireland, and a further announcement is expected on this in the forthcoming budget.

Tourism: Visa Waivers

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions she has had with the Dublin Government and the Secretary of State on a visa waiver scheme for tourists from Asia.

(AQO 1412/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I discussed this issue with Hugo Swire, NIO Minister of State last month.

The Republic of Ireland, ROI, introduced a visa waiver programme, operating for nationals of 16 countries for a trial period from July 2011 to October 2012, in order to seek to attract visitors to Ireland who hold a valid visa for entry into the UK. Under the programme, nationals of those countries arriving in the UK with a valid UK visa are able to enter the ROI without any further documentation. However, if they enter the ROI on an Irish visa they cannot then enter UK. They cannot therefore visit NI.

I have raised the issue of a reciprocal visa waiver scheme for those entering NI with a valid Irish visa. I understand there are security and resource implications which currently prevent the introduction of such a scheme. I will continue to raise this issue with both Governments.

Employment Opportunities

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the impact that inequalities of employment opportunities might have on the local economy.

(AQO 1413/11-15)

Mrs Foster: On the demand side we are now in an era where there are many safeguards in place to help ensure that employers award jobs opportunities to people on merit.

On the supply side there is still work to do to ensure that all sections of our society have the right qualifications, skills and ambitions to compete for jobs in today's economy. This is recognised in the Executive's draft Economic Strategy and its accompanying Integrated Impact Assessment. Clearly it is undesirable for an economy to have unfilled potential in any sections of its population.

Credit Unions

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions she has had with Credit Unions in relation to their concerns around the proposed changes to Financial Services Authority regulations.

(AQO 1414/11-15)

Mrs Foster: At their request, I have met with representatives of the Ulster Federation of Credit Unions to discuss some concerns, shared by the Irish League, especially in relation to the one year investment limit. Following our meeting, I wrote to both the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, FST, and the Chief Executive of the Financial Services Authority, FSA, setting out my views and seeking a review of the stated policy. As a result of my intervention, the FST has now offered to facilitate a meeting between the FSA and Northern Ireland MPs to discuss the issue directly. A number of credit unions have also had informal telephone contact with my officials to seek clarification on specific issues of future regulation.

HCL BPO Services: Job Losses

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on any discussions she has had in relation to the job losses at the HCL BPO Services call centre in Armagh.

(AQO 1415/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I have recently met with senior representatives from HCL BPO Services and throughout my discussions I have sought to retain and sustain as many jobs as possible for Northern Ireland. My officials in Invest NI are working closely with HCL in regards to the call centre in Armagh and have already proactively engaged with both existing and prospective investors to encourage them to consider the Armagh site and the associated infrastructure and skilled workforce as an excellent investment opportunity in the short term.

I am somewhat encouraged that the company plans are firmly focused on investing and growing in Northern Ireland and that HCL expects to find alternative employment for around 40% of staff affected by the announcement during the course of the 90 day consultation period.

All of the job losses announced are deeply regrettable and I can confirm that my Department have already engaged with colleagues in the Department for Employment and Learning and will leverage the support of all of our local partners to provide whatever support is necessary to limit the impact of any redundancies. This will include running redundancy clinics and offering training options and advisory support for any potential new business starts.

Credit Easing: Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on any discussions her Department has had with local banks about providing reasonable liquidity to small and medium sized enterprises.

(AQO 1416/11-15)

Mrs Foster: While DETI has no statutory control of the banking sector, we have met with the main banks in Northern Ireland, most recently in December 2011, to emphasise the importance of supporting business development and growth. These discussions have included encouraging banks to promote, where appropriate, the Enterprise Finance Guarantee Scheme and also stressing the importance of communicating clearly to business customers in relation to lending decisions.

In addition, DETI, through Invest NI, continues to develop and implement an Access to Capital Strategy which supports the availability of capital within the local SME market.

Department of the Environment

Archaeological Sites and Monuments: Conservation

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment (i) to outline any planned cuts to (a) the Historic Monument Scheduling Programme; and (b) the Countryside Management Scheme; and (ii) for his assessment of how any cuts might impact upon the conservation of archaeological sites and monuments.

(AQW 740/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): Following the Executive's budget outcome in March 2011, it was necessary to identify a range of savings measures to ensure the Department operated within the reduced budget approved by the Executive and to address a range of internal pressures, including the significant fall in planning income.

One such measure at that time was the suspension of the contract-based professional archaeological support to both the Historic Monuments Scheduling Programme and the Countryside Management Scheme.

However, during this financial year, I have taken the necessary steps to re-instate archaeological support in a number of these areas. Officials are presently working to achieve this for the remainder of this financial year.

In response to part (ii) of this question, the impact of this suspension of contract-based professional support for the Scheduling Programme in May 2011, along with the knock on effect of some other cuts and reprioritisation of work, was the temporary suspension of new schedulings, except on an ad-hoc or emergency basis. This has had a negative consequential impact on the future delivery of conservation works at archaeological sites and monuments. Officials will continue to prioritise works to ensure that the conservation of such sites is addressed on the basis of conservation need.

The Northern Ireland Countryside Management Scheme is the remit of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. Due to the loss of contracted professional support in my Department for a Countryside Management caseworker, Historic Monuments Unit suspended receipt of consultations from DARD seeking management specifications for historic monuments. I note the advice from officials that, subject to contractual provisions, and in the light of the steps that I took earlier in the year, it should be possible to re-instate archaeological support in some of these work areas for the remainder of the 2011/12 Financial Year, with provision for it to extend into the next Financial Year.

Environmental Schemes, Projects and Initiatives: ROI Co-operation

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the departmental schemes, projects or initiatives since May 2007 that have received co-operation from (a) a Republic of Ireland Government Department, or its agencies; and (b) any Republic of Ireland non-governmental organisation; and (ii) the departmental schemes, projects or initiatives for which he intends to seek co-operation from these bodies.

(AQW 904/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I have detailed at Annex A, the wide and diverse range of schemes, projects or initiatives that have received co-operation from the Department. I do believe, however that there is much greater scope for co-operation and some of the potential examples are identified in Annex B.

ANNEX A**DETAILS OF DEPARTMENTAL SCHEMES, PROJECTS OR INITIATIVES SINCE 2007 THAT HAVE RECEIVED CO-OPERATION FROM:**

DOE Business Area	Republic of Ireland Government Department, or its agencies	any Republic of Ireland non-governmental organisation
Environmental Policy Division (EPD)	<p>Euroscola 2007 - In Sept 2007, DOE Climate Change Unit part-funded a schools photographic competition to raise awareness about climate change. This was with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (now Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government); and the European Parliament Office in Ireland. Three winning schools were chosen to go to Strasbourg to take part in Euroscola 2007 – two from ROI and one from NI (St. Mary's, Derry).</p>	<p>Climate Change – Plugged in Places Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Project - In 2010 DOE and DRD established a consortium and jointly bid for, and were successful in securing, match funding from the Office of Low Emission Vehicles for a pilot project to install infrastructure, undertake research and promote electric vehicles. The two year pilot project which runs until 31 March 2013 will investigate a number of areas which will help inform decisions on a roll-out of infrastructure on a regional and UK level.</p> <p>The £2.4m pilot project will receive £850,000 of funding from OLEV with the remainder coming from the other consortium partners. Among the consortium members is ESB the energy supplier for the Republic of Ireland who have significant technical experience in this area and are committed to rolling out an extensive network of charge points in ROI.</p>
	<p>Single Use Carrier Bag Levy - 2011: DoE officials met with officials from the Office of the Revenue Commissioner to discuss a range of operational issues in respect of the collection and enforcement of the Republic of Ireland Plastic Bag Tax and have held several discussions with relevant officials on this matter.</p> <p>DoE officials have also liaised with officials in the Department of Environment, Heritage & Local Government (DEHLG) on this issue.</p>	<p>North South Market Development Steering Group (NSMDSG) - The Department is represented on the North South Market Development Steering Group (NSMDSG) and is supported on this Group by the Waste & Resources Action Programme (WRAP). WRAP is a UK-wide resource efficiency body with a delivery programme in Northern Ireland that is supported, through Grant-in-Aid funding from DOE, to progress a range of initiatives to reduce waste to landfill and to increase recycling. As part of WRAP's work plan agreed with the</p>

DOE Business Area	Republic of Ireland Government Department, or its agencies	any Republic of Ireland non-governmental organisation
Environmental Policy Division (EPD)		Department, WRAP has partnered the Irish recycling market development body, rx3, (which works on behalf of DECLG in ROI) in the production of a case study (during 2011/12) detailing the recovery of gypsum from plasterboard waste, which involves cross-border partners. A proposal to assess options for bulky waste across the island of Ireland has also been agreed - rx3 will lead on this project which is at final tender stage. A co-funded all-island plastics waste arising/recycling research project, led by rx3, has been completed and is due to be published during 2011.
	<p>Cross-Border Movements of Waste - In 2009 Environment Ministers approved a Framework Agreement setting out the roles of the relevant competent authorities in arranging the necessary contracts for the removal of the waste illegally deposited in Northern Ireland and the liability falling to each jurisdiction. It is set within the legal context provided by the EU Waste Shipments Regulation and follows on from the Road Map for tackling illegal movements of waste which was endorsed by Ministers from both jurisdictions in October 2007.</p> <p>The Framework Agreement which was signed by officials in DoE and DEHLG means that Ireland will pay for 80% of the costs of excavation, removal and remediation of the sites and 100% of the costs of disposal.</p>	
Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) – Environmental Protection	<p>Joint Irish Bathymetric Survey. (JIBS)</p> <p>- INTERREG IIIA funded project ran from 2007 to 2008 producing detailed marine maps 3 miles seaward of the North Coast from Malin Head to Fair Head.</p>	<p>Environmental Licensing of Marine Renewable Energy Devices - ESBI and Bord Gais are energy utilities partly owned by the Government in the south. Both have separately been involved in preliminary discussions re the environmental licensing of marine renewable energy devices in NI waters.</p>

DOE Business Area	Republic of Ireland Government Department, or its agencies	any Republic of Ireland non-governmental organisation
Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) – Environmental Protection	Ireland, Northern Ireland and Scotland HYDROgraphic Survey (INIS HYDRO). INTERREG IVA funded project running from 2011 to 2013 generating additional marine maps in selected areas.	
	Collaborative survey of intertidal areas in fulfilment of Water Framework Directive monitoring requirements	
	All Ireland Oil Spill Contractors Scheme - An all Ireland Oil Spill Response scheme has been established for Oil Spill Response Contractors to enhance and improve standards in the spill response industry. The scheme was introduced in 2006 following consultation with a wide range of government organisations throughout Ireland.	
	Cross Compliance Practitioners Group - NIEA and other Agencies across the UK (including the Isle of Man) along with colleagues from ROI (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (DAFF) and the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Office of Environmental Enforcement) participate in a Cross Compliance Practitioners forum. This Group considers Cross Compliance policy and operational issues to ensure commonality of approach, where appropriate, taking account differences in national legislation.	
Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) – Environmental Protection	Artificial Radioactivity in Carlingford Lough - The Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland (RPII) and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) published a joint report in 1992 which detailed the results of the analysis of the levels of radioactivity in a wide range of environmental media including sea water, marine sediments, seafood and seaweed. During 2012 RPII will perform sample analysis and NIEA will write and publish the final report. NIEA will work closely with RPII throughout the duration of the project to ensure that agreed objectives are met.	

DOE Business Area	Republic of Ireland Government Department, or its agencies	any Republic of Ireland non-governmental organisation
	<p>North/South Radiation Contact Group - The Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland (RPII) and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) meet periodically to discuss radiation issues particularly those of transboundary significance such as road transport, environmental monitoring, radon and response to overseas nuclear incidents.</p>	
	<p>The 4 Environment Agencies Meetings - The 4 UK and Ireland Environment Agencies, include, Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), Environment Agency (EA) – England & Wales, Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) - Ireland and meet on a bi-annual basis. Meeting are arranged to discuss areas of mutual interest, control and regulation, best practice and opportunities for collaboration.</p>	
	<p>The Environment Protection Agency Co-ordinates the monitoring of bathing waters in the South. NIEA do the same function in the North.</p>	<p>An Taisce administer the Blue Flag award scheme in the South. TidyNI deliver the same scheme in the North. In 2009 the awards were jointly presented at a single ceremony on Dollymount Strand.</p>
Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) – Environmental Protection	INTERREG III funded project – NS SHARE; total cost €7.5m. Ran from 2004 – 2008. Project took forward the coordination of the implementation of Water Framework Directive on a North South basis. Rol Agencies involved: DEHLG, EPA, Monaghan and Donegal County Councils and the National Parks and Wildlife Service.	
NIEA – Natural Heritage	OrchidIreland. An Island of Ireland biological recording scheme jointly funded with National Parks and Wildlife Service	Waterbeetles of Ireland Atlas: An Island of Ireland biological data project with the National Biodiversity Data Centre, Waterford.
	Natural History of Ulster. A publication covering the nine counties of Ulster, explaining the natural history present. Co funded with Heritage Council	

DOE Business Area	Republic of Ireland Government Department, or its agencies	any Republic of Ireland non-governmental organisation
	LichenIreland: An Island of Ireland biological recording scheme jointly funded with National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Office of Public Works	
	Publication of Irish Bryophyte Red Data Book: An Island of Ireland biological data project jointly funded with National Parks and Wildlife Service	
	Non-marine Mollusca: An Island of Ireland biological data project jointly funded with National Parks and Wildlife Service	
	ISCOPE II and III (Irish Scheme for Cetacean Observation and Public Education): An Island of Ireland biological recording/monitoring scheme jointly funded with National Parks and Wildlife Service	Irish Whale and Dolphin Group deliver the scheme
	Atlas of Breeding and Wintering Birds in GB and Ireland: a national project to produce a status atlas. NPWS involved in funding.	Birdwatch Ireland involved in delivery
	Greylag Geese census: a national project to produce an assessment of greylag geese numbers in Ireland.	Birdwatch Ireland involved in delivery
	All-Ireland Bat monitoring: An Island of Ireland biological recording/monitoring scheme jointly funded with National Parks and Wildlife Service	Bat Conservation Ireland involved in delivery
NIEA – Natural Heritage	Car-Based Bat monitoring: An Island of Ireland biological recording/monitoring scheme jointly funded with National Parks and Wildlife Service	Bat Conservation Ireland involved in delivery
	All Ireland Daubenton's Bat Monitoring: An Island of Ireland biological recording/monitoring scheme jointly funded with National Parks and Wildlife Service	Bat Conservation Ireland involved in delivery
	Invasive Species Ireland: A joint funded project with National Parks and Wildlife Service to deliver recommendations of all-Ireland invasive species strategy	

DOE Business Area	Republic of Ireland Government Department, or its agencies	any Republic of Ireland non-governmental organisation
Human Resources and Organisational Change		<p>From December 2006 to March 2011 the Department's Communication Unit provided funding of £25k pa to ECO-UNESCO to run the Young Environmentalist Programme. This represents 25% of the total cost.</p> <p>The Young Environmentalist Awards has been run in Northern Ireland since 2001. It is an all-Ireland environmental awards scheme aimed at raising awareness in young people aged between 10 and 18. In Northern Ireland it has been promoted in post-Primary schools, of which there are approximately 350.</p>
EU Grants – INTERREG IIIA	<p>In conjunction with DEHLG Water Quality Monitoring Buoys - Purchase and install four additional telemetry systems in the Foyle and Carlingford catchments to gather information on a number of environmental parameters.</p>	
	<p>In conjunction with DEHLG Inshore Patrol vessel –Provide an inshore patrol vessel to monitor, protect and conserve the fisheries and their environment in Carlingford Lough.</p>	
	<p>In conjunction with DEHLG Tagging & Detection Units - Purchase three coded wire tagging units and four detection units for the marking of juvenile salmon as they are migrating from the river to their feeding grounds as smolts</p>	
EU Grants – INTERREG IIIA	<p>In conjunction with DEHLG Combined Fishery Enhance & Management Programme - Establish salmon spawning targets, locally, regionally and at national level and ensure that sufficient adult salmon are available to spawn and maximise the smolt output from freshwater sources</p>	
	<p>In conjunction with DEHLG Fish Surveying echo-sounders - Carry out quantitative acoustic (echo-sounder) survey of fish populations in Lough Erne using the latest portable computer based scientific equipment</p>	

DOE Business Area	Republic of Ireland Government Department, or its agencies	any Republic of Ireland non-governmental organisation
	<p>In conjunction with DEHLG Pilot Project to Track Shellfishery vessels</p> <p>- The objectives were: Record the activities of shellfish fishing vessels, map shellfish habitats and collate spatial information digitally; Improve surveillance and policing by upgrading equipment; Support the development and implementation of shellfish management plans and improve knowledge of shellfish populations;</p>	
	<p>In conjunction with DEHLG Waste Awareness Media Campaign -A high profile TV and media advertising campaign to raise awareness at public and business levels of the need to reduce the volume of waste going to landfill and to treat waste as a resource which can be recycled into useful products</p>	
	<p>In conjunction with DEHLG NS SHARE - Promote joint action on the management of the aquatic environment and strengthen the inter-regional capacity for environmental management, improve public awareness and participation in environmental issues and protect and enhance the environment.</p>	
EU Grants – INTERREG IIIA	<p>In conjunction with DEHLG Lough Melvin Catchment Management Plan</p> <p>- Identify the amount of phosphorus currently entering Lough Melvin, and initiate engagement and incentives for reduction measures and the valuation of the presence of 3 rare trout subspecies threatened by the current upward trend in lake nutrients.</p>	
	<p>In conjunction with DEHLG Blackwater TRACE - Define the multi-source nature of nutrient transfer in agricultural river catchments and implement mitigation measures under the terms of the Water Framework Directive.</p>	

DOE Business Area	Republic of Ireland Government Department, or its agencies	any Republic of Ireland non-governmental organisation
	In conjunction with DEHLG Forest impacts on upland lakes - Investigate water quality and, by assessing changes in the composition of lake sediments check for a number of potentially deleterious biological impacts associated with tree planting, fertilisation and timber harvesting.	
	In conjunction with DEHLG Research Regarding Waste Management Strategies - Undertake research to address the current lack of cross border waste management strategic planning.	
	In conjunction with DEHLG Producer Waste Awareness - Deliver a series of one-day courses to waste producers in the border region, offering training in waste minimisation, safety and environmental concerns.	
EU Grants – INTERREG IVA	In conjunction with DEHLG Agricultural Need for Sustainable Willow Effluent Recycling - To provide robust scientific data on the sustainability of Short Rotation Coppice Willow for biofiltration/ bioremediation technologies.	
	In conjunction with DEHLG 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.	
EU Grants – INTERREG IVA	In conjunction with DEHLG 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.	

DOE Business Area	Republic of Ireland Government Department, or its agencies	any Republic of Ireland non-governmental organisation
	<p>In conjunction with DEHLG 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.</p>	
	<p>In conjunction with DEHLG 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.</p>	
	<p>In conjunction with DEHLG 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.</p>	
	<p>In conjunction with DEHLG Halting biodiversity loss - To boost the population and range of Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species across the eligible area.</p>	
<p>Driver and Vehicle Agency</p>	<p>The Driver & Vehicle Agency carries out regular enforcement operations targeting goods vehicles, buses and taxis engaged on cross border activities. These operations are planned and carried out jointly with the Road Safety Authority on both sides of the border with the aim of scrutinising drivers and vehicles to ensure compliance with legal requirements. A number of brief updates have been provided to the NSMC by the Minister following enforcement exercises carried out to assess the standard of coaches and buses engaged in regular cross border journeys. EU regulation 2006/22 also requires cooperation between Member States to ensure that drivers hours compliance is promoted through concerted checks, joint training initiatives, the electronic exchange of information, and the exchange of intelligence and experience.</p>	

ANNEX B

Departmental schemes, projects or initiatives for which the Minister of the Environment intends to seek co-operation from Republic of Ireland Government Departments, agencies or non-governmental organisations (not exhaustive)

Single use Carrier Bag levy

From the Office of the Revenue Commissioner and DEHLG in respect of the development of the Single Use Carrier Bag Levy in Northern Ireland in order to continue to draw out further issues of which the Department should be aware (including any "lessons learned.").

Cross Border Movement of Waste

There may be a need, pending the infrastructure becoming operational, for the Waste Management Groups to seek interim solutions for specific waste streams in order to achieve compliance with EU landfill diversion targets.

If the Minister consents, it would be proposed to establish the scope for facilities in both jurisdictions to respond to tenders for specific waste streams in the context of compliance with the regulatory requirements governing transfrontier shipments of municipal waste in Ireland and the UK, and with application of the Waste Framework Directive obligations in respect of the principles of proximity and self-sufficiency.

This would require officials to:

- liaise with DOEHLG to identify the legislative framework within which specific waste streams are required to be addressed in each jurisdiction;
- identify any barriers to cross-border movements of waste for landfill diversion; and
- Determine the extent to which those barriers can be addressed.

Inter-Departmental Waste Service Procurement Forum

DOEHLG and DOENI have both been involved either directly or indirectly in substantial procurements across a range of waste services in order to meet legislative obligations. To date there has been minimal exchange in terms of lessons learned with regard to the administrative, financial, technical and legal issues that arise in the course of such procurements. Officials in both jurisdictions could benefit from having the opportunity to explore and review their respective experiences in this area, both through the forum and through short-term interchanges.

All Ireland Beach Awards

Co-operation in publishing the results of bathing waters monitoring. This is an opportunity to reinstate the beach awards into an all island event in order to promote joint cooperation and support the all island tourism effort.

An Taisce will participate in a Good Beach summit on 29 June 2011 hosted by Minister.

Priority Landscapes for Bats in Ireland

A joint funded project to model bat diversity and abundance with Bat Conservation Ireland and a range of local authorities in Rol.

Built heritage and canals

Re-watering of canals while preserving built heritage features.

World Heritage Status for the Royal Sites of Ireland

Cooperation with ROI (DEH&LG), in collaboration with District Councils, in an application to secure the addition of Navan Fort and the Historic Walls of Derry as part of this group of sites, to the World Heritage list.

An archaeological survey of the maritime cultural landscapes on Loughs Carlingford and Foyle

A new proposal to produce two collaborative projects with heritage information, protection of the maritime heritage, excellent published books, exhibitions and media profile.

Thatched Buildings at risk from dereliction

Maintain the skill base and growing (rather than importing) appropriate, sustainable, materials with co-operation and agreement with DEH&LG.

Climate Change

Collaboration to seek EU funding for research into the impact of Climate Change on Built Heritage.

FP 7/Life and and Future EU Funding

In addition to work which the Minister has requested in the remainder of the 2008-14 funding cycle, where opportunities exist, to also prepare for the 2011-20 funding cycle.

All Ireland Waste Strategy including Plastics

In addition to work which the Minister has requested on a number of waste issues, to identify if an all Ireland waste approach is permissible and feasible.

All Ireland Renewable Energy

To consider further opportunities for licensing/regulation of renewable energy and to join up cross Ireland, cross departmental work in this regard.

Hydraulic Fracturing: Pollution of Waterways

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment if he can guarantee that enforcement action will be taken by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency against anyone responsible for the pollution of waterways as a result of fracking.

(AQO 483/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is responsible for investigating reports of water pollution, for regulating all discharges to waterways and underground strata, and for initiating enforcement action where appropriate.

NIEA will respond to every reported pollution incident with a view to:

- a) tracing the source of pollution;
- b) stopping the pollution at source;
- c) identifying the polluter;
- d) collecting sufficient evidence, if appropriate, to secure a prosecution;
- e) notifying persons who may be affected by a serious incident;
- f) organising/giving advice for clean-up operations (if required);
- g) preventing the continuation or the repetition of pollution; and
- h) enforcing the legislation and making the polluter pay.

Any company proposing to use a hydraulic fracturing process (Fracking) will, depending on the exact details of the operation, require a consent to discharge, under the Water (Northern Ireland) Order, and

a licence to abstract under the Water Abstraction and Impoundment (Licensing) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006.

Other permissions and assessments may be required from NIEA depending upon the activities proposed by the company and their exact location in relation to sensitive environmental receptors.

I can assure you that NIEA will enforce the conditions of any consent or licence in line with NIEAs Enforcement and Prosecution Policy.

Councils: Debt Reduction

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 5494/11-15, whether guidance on how to reduce costs is being offered to councils with high levels of debt.

(AQW 6770/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Councils are bodies corporate as defined in the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972, and as such, are independent of the Department and directly responsible for decisions regarding their own financial affairs.

Under the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 there is a duty on each council to determine and keep under review how much money it can afford to borrow. The Local Government Auditor has not raised any concerns to date about the levels of debt in any council.

However, in moving to an 11-Council model, all existing 26 councils will need to consider the impact of current and any future debt on the councils with which they will be merging. I will be monitoring this over the next three years and will be encouraging Councils not to increase their debt levels in that period without reference to their Voluntary Transition Committees. I am also considering the possibility of introducing legislation to limit capital expenditure and related aspects such as the use of reserves as we progress towards Reform.

Hydraulic Fracturing: Public Inquiry

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the benefits of a public inquiry into the health and environmental impacts of hydraulic fracturing before the practice is permitted.

(AQW 7755/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department has various powers to call a public inquiry or independent examination in public should it consider necessary to do so.

When a planning application or applications involving hydraulic fracturing are submitted the Department will be in a position to decide how best these proposals should be progressed.

Generally the need for a public inquiry or independent examination in public in relation to a planning application emerges through consultation responses and public representations where issues raised cannot be satisfactorily dealt with through the normal development management process.

I have now met Tamboran. I made it very clear that all appropriate environmental standards will be complied with. I am assessing what is the strongest basis on which to proceed and continue to liaise with the Dublin Government on the environmental issues in relation to fracking.

European Charter of Local Self-Government

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of (i) the (a) strengths; and (b) weaknesses of the European Charter of Local Self-Government; and (ii) whether it would be beneficial for Northern Ireland to sign up to the Charter.

(AQW 7933/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Charter establishes standards for measuring and safeguarding the rights of local authorities and providing the citizen with the opportunity to participate effectively in decision-making

on issues that affect their everyday environment. It commits governments to applying basic rules guaranteeing the political, administrative and financial independence of local authorities. For councils in Northern Ireland, these guarantees are enshrined in the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 and subsequent legislation.

The Charter also provides that local self-government should have the ability, within the limits of the law, to regulate and manage a substantial share of public functions under its own responsibility in the interests of the local population. Historically, this has not been the case in Northern Ireland, with councils having responsibility for a more limited range of functions than their counterparts in other jurisdictions. This does not, however, detract from the importance of our councils and the contribution they make to civic life.

The issue of whether the Charter should apply to Northern Ireland, through the London Government adding the region to its ratification of the Charter, will need to be considered, may be useful, but should be assessed in the context of the transfer of functions to councils under RPA. Of course, the more Departments are willing to transfer functions, and transfer more functions, the greater the relevance of the Charter.

Planning Applications: Area of Special Scientific Interest

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the number of planning applications submitted within an Area of Special Scientific Interest in each of the last five years; (ii) the number and percentage of applications approved; (iii) the number and percentage of applications refused; and (iv) the number and percentage of applications withdrawn.

(AQW 8034/11-15)

Mr Attwood: DOE Planning has received 17 planning applications located wholly within an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) in the last five years. The table below sets out the details of these applications.

Application Reference	Status	Proposal
C/2008/0820/F	Granted	Dwelling house
C/2011/0117/F	Withdrawn	Temporary lifeguard unit with metal support base and storage container to be positioned in May and removed in September every year that RNLI holds the Lifeguard Service Agreement
C/2011/0134/F	Granted	Seasonal Placement (May - September) of Temporary Mobile Lifeguard Facility.
D/2009/0114/F	Granted	Erection of 15 m high 5S tower with 6 no DBDP antennas 4 no 600 mm microwave dish with supporting apparatus equipment cabinet etc within 12 m x 12 m compound with 1.8 m high fencing
E/2008/0061/RM	Granted	Proposal to provide farm workers dwelling & detached garage
E/2009/0063/O	Granted	Retention alteration and extension of existing dwelling.
E/2009/0267/O	Withdrawn	Single storey dwelling and workshop
E/2010/0003/A	Deferred	Free standing sign (sign has been erected for 17 years)
E/2010/0140/F	Granted	Retention alteration & extension of existing dwelling with amendment to condition no. 3 of outline planning approval (E/2009/0063/O)
E/2012/0021/F	Valid	Overhead commercial three phase line on wooden poles (11/06200)

Application Reference	Status	Proposal
G/2009/0072/O	Granted	Site of replacement dwelling and garage.
R/2007/0172/F	Granted	Proposed balcony
R/2011/0151/F	Council	New stretch/Length of pathway to complete route of Granite Trail Newcastle
S/2010/0414/F	Granted	2 storey extension of existing building to form new plant room.
S/2010/0716/F	Granted	Erection of 250kw wind turbine (hub height 30m) to serve electricity grid.
W/2009/0402/A	Granted	Interpretation panel on the North Down coastal path - Interpretation of flora/fauna & natural history.
W/2009/0685/F	Granted	The existing path is to be relocated over a length of 210m to allow for removal of steps and steep gradients on the route.

Source: DOE Planning

Notes:

- 1 Figures quoted may include applications that were submitted to the Department prior to the designation of an ASSI.
- 2 Figures quoted may differ from officially published statistics and may be subject to revision.

Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises: DOE Spend

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment how much his Department has spent on conferences, away-days and team building exercises in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8110/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The table below provides details of expenditure by the Department on conferences over the period 2008/09 to 2010/11. Expenditure on away days and team building is not separately identifiable from the Department's accounting systems.

Business Area	2008/09 £	2009/10 £	2010/11 £
Department (excluding agencies)	19,572	36,750	65,010
Northern Ireland Environment Agency	31,226	42,289	12,321
Planning Service	45,874	30,422	587
Driver and Vehicle Agency	5,969	1,556	2,433
Total	102,641	111,017	80,351

The breakdown of costs between the Department and its agencies is distorted in the final year due to the centralisation of corporate services. However, in overall terms, there has been almost a 28% reduction in the costs of conferences between 2009/10 and 2010/11.

Hydraulic Fracturing: NIEA Training

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department will increase staffing levels or staff training in the Environment Agency to regulate hydraulic fracturing; and if so, how an increase in staff levels or staff training will be funded.

(AQW 8112/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The environmental regulation of Fracking by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) will be subject to the requirements and environmental standards set out in the relevant European Directives and local legislation.

NIEA is currently supplementing its knowledge of the process through reviewing emerging research, studying case studies from other parts of the world and liaising with counterparts in other Environment Agencies in Britain and Ireland and other EU countries where Fracking is currently proposed or taking place.

As studies, reports and assessments are completed a broader evidence base will emerge which will aid more effective decision making on the process should an application for an environmental permission be received for a Fracking operation. This will include an assessment of any additional resources, including staff training and numbers, required to regulate the process.

It is NIEA policy to recover costs on the polluter pays principle in accordance with government and treasury guidance. This is reflected in the NIEA schemes of fees and charges whereby all costs incurred in carrying out our regulatory functions, such as processing licence/permit applications and assessing the environmental impact of the proposal, are recovered from the applicant through application fees and annual charges.

Drivers: Licences Issued to those Aged Over 70

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of the Environment how many licensed drivers there are aged (i) over 70; (ii) over 80; (iii) over 90; and (iv) over 100 years.

(AQW 8227/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The information requested is as follows:

Drivers between 70 and just under 80	73742
Drivers between 80 and just under 90	23452
Drivers between 90 and just under 100	1611
Drivers over 100	3

Road Freight Operator Licences

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of the Environment how many road freight operator's licences have been issued in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8232/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The number of road freight operator licences issued in each of the last five years is as follows.

2010-11	387
2009-10	571
2008-09	542
2007-08	566
2006-07	335

Historic Buildings: Targeted Surveys

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment what consideration his Department has given to increasing the number of targeted surveys of historic buildings which may be at risk.

(AQW 8257/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency responds quickly to information that potentially listable historic buildings may be at risk. The Planning Amendment Order of 2003 allows the

Department to temporarily list buildings for six months while a full survey is carried out. A building must satisfy two criterion to be temporarily listed in this way: In the view of the Department the building must be of special architectural and historic interest; and it must be in danger of demolition or of alteration in such a way as to affect its character as a building of such interest.

37 buildings have been protected using this power since 2003. This reached a peak in 2009 when 15 buildings were protected. Numbers have declined since in line with reduced overall redevelopment activity in Northern Ireland.

NIEA has clear procedures in place to allow its team to respond quickly to all listing queries highlighted by the public or from staff. However, because one off records cost more than twice as much as systematic area surveys (see answer AQW 8259 11-14) all potential surveys are 'risk assessed' before any detailed work is commissioned.

Budget changes in 2011 mean that funding for systematic area survey work is programmed to decline over the next few years. I will shortly coincide budget issues for 2012/13 and beyond and I will look at these issues. In that context, I am looking at how its remaining funds for this function can be deployed. Ensuring that unlisted buildings at risk can be protected is likely to form a key part of this review.

Listed Buildings: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the names of the listed buildings in the North Down constituency.

(AQW 8279/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I refer to AQW 3542/11-15, answered on 3 November 2011. The detail remains the same, apart from the fact that the total number of listed buildings in the North Down Borough Council Area is now reduced by one, to 256 and the relative numbers in each electoral ward have changed as a result. I have appended an updated table for your information. This gives a total of 314 listed buildings in your constituency. It should be noted that North Down is currently being reviewed under the second survey process and this figure may change again when all records have been reviewed.

NUMBER OF LISTED BUILDINGS IN THE NORTH DOWN AND ARDS DISTRICT COUNCIL AREAS

HB23 - North Down			HB24 - Ards		
1	Groomsport	13	1	Portaferry	73
2	Churchill	1	2	Kircubbin	22
3	Ballyholme	1	3	Ballyhalbert	5
4	Ballymagee	1	4	Grey Abbey	62
5	Bangor Harbour	24	5	Carrowdore	6
6	Conlig	4	6	Donaghadee North	26
7	Bangor Castle	24	7	Donaghadee South	32
8	Whitehill	0	8	Loughries	10
9	Rathgael	0	9	Movilla	5
10	Clandeboye	18	10	Glen	3
11	Silverstream	0	11	Scrabo	16
12	Spring Hill	0	12	Ulsterville	0
13	Bryansburn	1	13	Central	43
14	Princetown	12	14	Comber North	0

HB23 - North Down			HB24 - Ards		
15	Crawfordsburn	23	15	Comber South	32
16	Craigavad	21	16	Ballygowan	13
17	Loughview	6	17	Killinchy	31
18	Cultra	29			
19	Holywood Demesne	11			
20	Holywood Priory	67			
	Total	256		Total	379

Planning Policy Statement 21: Review

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of the Environment what progress has been made on the review of PPS 21, or the interpretation and implementation of the policy.

(AQW 8302/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The review of the operation of PPS21 is now concluded. I am currently finalising the review report and will announce the outcome of the review in the near future.

In relation to the interpretation and implementation of the policy I can advise that training was rolled out to all planning staff in October 2011 to ensure consistency.

In addition a peer review of decided PPS21 cases has also been initiated. These cases are discussed at the monthly Development Management Working Group and an agreed position is confirmed by the group.

River Pollution

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what resources are deployed by his Department to combat river pollution.

(AQW 8337/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is responsible for investigating reports of pollution affecting ground or surface waters and for instigating enforcement action, where necessary, under the terms of the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999.

In respect of water pollution response, NIEA has 51 full-time staff across Northern Ireland dealing with water pollution incidents and associated activity. NIEA headquarters staff, based in Lisburn, consists of scientific and administrative personnel, who co-ordinate and manage a number of water pollution related work areas including; the response to water pollution reports, the associated enforcement processes, pollution prevention initiatives, information management and the response to correspondence from elected representatives, the general public and the press. The management of incidents can include mobilising staff and anti-pollution equipment and liaising with partner organisations such as the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure's Inland Fisheries or NI Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS).

For the purposes of incident investigation in the field, Northern Ireland is divided into 9 NIEA Pollution Control Areas with field staff based at various offices around the Province. Within the field staff resource, there are approximately 30 water quality inspectors who are professionally trained in pollution incident investigation techniques, response and pollution prevention processes. Additionally, there are 8 full-time sampling staff who carry out routine sampling at river monitoring sites and consented wastewater and industrial discharge sites.

NIEA maintains a stockpile of specialist equipment that can be deployed to carry out 'clean-up' operations following water pollution incidents in the freshwater or marine aquatic environment. Trailers

carrying pollution 'clean up' and prevention equipment in respect of inland waterways are maintained at 13 sites across Northern Ireland and 3 trailers carrying specific marine incident equipment are located at Duncrue St in Belfast. NIEA also supply NIFRS with pollution prevention equipment which is carried on their incident response vehicles.

As well as reacting to and investigating water pollution incidents, NIEA also carries out a significant number of proactive regulatory activities under various legislation. These activities are on-going in nature and also act to prevent or regulate water pollutants in order to minimise impacts on the aquatic environment. Such activities include the production of localised action plans designed to deliver the requirements of the Water Framework Directive, regulation of discharges under the Water (NI) Order 1999 and the regulation of agricultural activities. Further to the NIEA's regulatory activities, inspection visits are carried out at a significant number of industrial, water utility and agricultural premises each year.

Pollution: Croft Burn

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department is taking to prevent further pollution incidents of the Croft Burn, Holywood.

(AQW 8339/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) leads in protecting, conserving and promoting the unique natural and built environment of Northern Ireland.

NIEA is responsible for investigating reports of water pollution, for regulating discharges to waterways and underground strata and for initiating enforcement action where appropriate under the terms of the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999.

A suspected water pollution incident was reported in the Croft Burn, Holywood by a member of the public on 15 February 2012. Following investigation the source of the Medium Severity incident was traced to a discharge from an Northern Ireland Water (NIW) sewage network Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO). The CSO discharge occurred as a result of a blockage within the sewerage network. NIEA requested NIW to take remedial action to prevent further discharge.

Blockages of this nature are generally caused by the flushing of inappropriate items into the sewerage system by the public and by commercial concerns. NIW has widely promoted the 'Bag It and Bin It' campaign to raise awareness of this issue and to minimise the number of sewer blockage related pollution incidents. As a result of this incident, NIEA will contact NIWL to discuss carrying out a targeted 'Bag It and Bin It' leaflet drop in the Croft Burn catchment.

As well as NIEA's regulatory activities, inspection visits are carried out at a significant number of industrial, water utility and agricultural premises each year. These activities act to prevent or regulate water pollutants in order to minimise impacts on the aquatic environment.

Hydraulic Fracturing: Planning Applications

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, in light of the article in the Blackpool Gazette on Thursday 9 February 2012, which reported a loophole in the law which enabled Cuadrilla Resources to begin hydraulic fracturing operations in England before a full Environmental Impact Assessment was conducted as the drilling area was smaller than one hectare, whether he can confirm that the same loophole does not exist in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 8352/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The extraction of natural gas from shale by means of hydraulic fracturing is development requiring planning permission. While the Department has not received any planning applications for such development an application, if submitted, would require screening as to the need for environmental impact assessment under the Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (NI) 1999. In my view, an EIA would clearly be needed. Hydraulic fracturing falls within Schedule 2 (2) of the above regulations – Extractive Industry (d) Deep drillings where the applicable threshold for Environmental Assessment is where the area of the proposed works exceeds one hectare. It is also EIA development if it is in a sensitive area – for example an ASSI, AONB, or a European designated site.

In relation to the applicable thresholds in Schedule 2 noted above the Department has the power under regulation 3(a) of the EIA regulations to direct that development described in Schedule 2 which is not in a sensitive area or does not meet the applicable thresholds is still EIA development. Given the nature of the hydraulic fracturing process an environmental impact statement will be required whether or not the development exceeds the thresholds by virtue of regulation 3(a). There is therefore no loophole in the current legislation in Northern Ireland that will allow planning applications for hydraulic fracturing on sites less than one hectare to be submitted without an Environmental Impact Assessment.

I have recently met with Tamboran Resources, the company who are proposing to extract gas in Fermanagh and stressed the absolute need for the most rigorous Environmental Impact Assessment to be carried out and submitted with any planning application or applications. The company have accepted my demands in this matter and agreed to provide such an assessment.

Moreover, I am currently considering the environmental requirements in advance of any planning application and in respect of any exploratory drilling that the company may wish to undertake. In addition, I am maintaining and deepening liaison with Dublin, given the shared character of the Lough Allen Basin, and there is ongoing consideration if shared opportunities exist in relation to assessments around fracking.

Landfill: Dargan Road, Belfast

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of the Environment whether, as part of its site selection process, ARC 21 assessed the landfill site at Dargan Road in Belfast for its suitability for a municipal waste incinerator. **(AQW 8384/11-15)**

Mr Attwood: During their competitive tendering process for waste treatment facilities arc21 established a site selection process designed to ensure a level playing field for bidders and to promote competitive tension in the interests of ratepayers.

arc21 identified public sector sites suitable for waste infrastructure facilities and the Group also trawled for available private sector sites. Bidders could forward their own proposed sites. All sites were subjected to the same site selection processes. The Dargan Road site was one of the public sector sites offered for consideration.

By 2009 arc21 had identified the Belfast City Council Dargan Road site as a preferred site that could accommodate both Energy from Waste (EfW) and Mechanical and Biological Treatment (MBT) infrastructure. However at a full Council meeting in June 2009, at which arc21 sought final endorsement of the Dargan Road site, the Council voted against the use of the site for EfW infrastructure though it was prepared to progress with an MBT proposal.

Subsequently arc21 set aside the Dargan site and progressed the competitive tender process on the basis of alternative sites.

Landfill: Treatment Capacities

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department has identified the total annual waste tonnage capacity requirement for thermal treatment or gasification facilities, to meet EU waste management targets before 2020.

(AQW 8386/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The table below identifies the minimum treatment capacities which would be required in order to achieve compliance with District Councils NI Landfill Allowance Scheme obligations at 2020.

Treatment Technology	Efficiency of Diversion achieved	*Tonnage to Divert	Treatment Capacity Required(b) (c)
MBT + Landfill(a)	50%	128,674	451,488

Treatment Technology	Efficiency of Diversion achieved	*Tonnage to Divert	Treatment Capacity Required(b) (c)
MBT + Cement Kiln	75%	128,674	300,992
MBT + EfW	98%	128,674	230,351

* Based on amount landfilled in 2010/11

- (a) denotes Mechanical Biological Treatment (MBT) capacity + landfill required for interim solution until Energy from Waste (EfW) and cement kiln facilities become operational
- (b) the tonnage to be treated always exceeds the tonnage to be diverted as no technology is able to achieve 100% diversion
- (c) assumes that the Biodegradable Municipal Waste content of Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) remains stable; that MSW growth re-establishes towards 2020 as the economic environment improves; and that this growth is offset by increased recycling.

Cars: Licensed in 2011

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how many cars are registered.
(AQW 8430/11-15)

Mr Attwood: At 31 December 2011 there were 926,514 cars licensed in Northern Ireland. This figure includes any car with either a current vehicle licence or where there is a current statutory off road notification (SORN) in force.

Councils: General Grant

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the level of general grant to be provided by his Department and the Department of Finance and Personnel to each council in the 2012/13 financial year.

(AQW 8448/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The General Grant is made up of two elements, the de-rating and resources elements. The payment of the General Grant is administered by the Department of the Environment; however, the policy responsibility for the de-rating element rests with the Department of Finance and Personnel. From 1 April 2012 there will be two separate grants called the rates support grant and the de-rating grant.

The levels of de-rating grant and rates support grant to be provided in the 2012/13 financial year are set out in the table below. The de-rating grant will be revised later in the 2012/13 financial year when updated valuation data is available.

District Council	De-rating Grant £	Rates Support Grant £	Total £
Antrim	1,123,924	0	1,123,924
Ards	515,346	845,001	1,360,347
Armagh	778,009	1,524,425	2,302,434
Ballymena	1,357,726	17,079	1,374,805
Ballymoney	277,744	1,060,048	1,337,792
Banbridge	463,278	1,057,247	1,520,525
Belfast	4,153,818	0	4,153,818
Carrickfergus	562,262	530,758	1,093,020

District Council	De-rating Grant £	Rates Support Grant £	Total £
Castlereagh	675,538	0	675,538
Coleraine	618,583	0	618,583
Cookstown	844,190	511,868	1,356,058
Craigavon	2,128,450	1,003,046	3,131,496
Derry	1,520,045	1,321,823	2,841,868
Down	480,640	1,300,624	1,781,264
Dungannon & South Tyrone	1,656,632	842,054	2,498,686
Fermanagh	808,552	893,434	1,701,986
Larne	530,087	84,186	614,273
Limavady	214,395	1,215,115	1,429,510
Lisburn	1,737,465	0	1,737,465
Magherafelt	766,808	1,077,011	1,843,819
Moyle	169,436	503,874	673,310
Newry & Mourne	1,206,387	1,477,106	2,683,493
Newtownabbey	1,365,215	0	1,365,215
North Down	557,581	0	557,581
Omagh	599,681	1,236,312	1,835,993
Strabane	292,679	1,825,989	2,118,668
Total	25,404,471	18,327,000	43,731,471

Councils: Domestic Local Rates/Non-domestic Local Rates

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the (i) domestic local rate; and (ii) non-domestic local rate for each council in (a) each of the last five financial years; and (b) the 2012/13 financial year.

(AQW 8452/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The domestic and non-domestic local rates for each council in (a) each of the last five financial years and (b) the 2012/2013 financial year are set out in the tables below.

District Council	Domestic District Rates					
	2007/ 2008 Pence	2008/ 2009 Pence	2009/ 2010 Pence	2010/ 2011 Pence	2011/ 2012 Pence	2012/ 2013 Pence
Antrim	0.2875	0.3159	0.3404	0.3585	0.3637	0.3672
Ards	0.2409	0.2493	0.2617	0.2695	0.2721	0.2746
Armagh	0.3174	0.3393	0.3628	0.3878	0.3975	0.4052
Ballymena	0.2874	0.3157	0.3345	0.3576	0.3674	0.3758
Ballymoney	0.2768	0.2878	0.3097	0.3328	0.3421	0.3525

District Council	Domestic District Rates					
	2007/ 2008 Pence	2008/ 2009 Pence	2009/ 2010 Pence	2010/ 2011 Pence	2011/ 2012 Pence	2012/ 2013 Pence
Banbridge	0.3003	0.3121	0.3244	0.3405	0.3524	0.3626
Belfast	0.2423	0.2540	0.2717	0.2929	0.3016	0.3094
Carrickfergus	0.2986	0.3195	0.3450	0.3645	0.3728	0.3810
Castlereagh	0.1871	0.1902	0.1902	0.1968	0.2017	0.2136
Coleraine	0.2506	0.2654	0.2812	0.2952	0.3058	0.3146
Cookstown	0.2444	0.2564	0.2663	0.2730	0.2758	0.2797
Craigavon	0.3395	0.3474	0.3576	0.3647	0.3771	0.3846
Derry	0.3365	0.3533	0.3730	0.3916	0.4004	0.4092
Down	0.2873	0.3065	0.3143	0.3356	0.3356	0.3423
Dungannon & South Tyrone	0.2284	0.2434	0.2542	0.2542	0.2542	0.2542
Fermanagh	0.2032	0.2172	0.2357	0.2448	0.2477	0.2501
Larne	0.3236	0.3318	0.3318	0.3448	0.3551	0.3694
Limavady	0.3335	0.3555	0.3750	0.4034	0.4005	0.4050
Lisburn	0.2275	0.2314	0.2374	0.2421	0.2493	0.2592
Magherafelt	0.2214	0.2278	0.2344	0.2541	0.2590	0.2641
Moyle	0.3245	0.3550	0.3749	0.3749	0.3749	0.3832
Newry & Mourne	0.2672	0.2803	0.2992	0.3197	0.3197	0.3261
Newtownabbey	0.2832	0.2999	0.3057	0.3207	0.3286	0.3379
North Down	0.2235	0.2402	0.2598	0.2676	0.2756	0.2852
Omagh	0.3243	0.3400	0.3553	0.3659	0.3709	0.3772
Strabane	0.2937	0.3127	0.3361	0.3508	0.3445	0.3580

District Council	Non-Domestic District Rates					
	2007/ 2008 Pence	2008/ 2009 Pence	2009/ 2010 Pence	2010/ 2011 Pence	2011/ 2012 Pence	2012/ 2013 Pence
Antrim	21.5586	23.6886	25.5261	26.8813	27.2711	27.5346
Ards	19.8840	20.5819	21.6090	22.2510	22.4620	22.6693
Armagh	23.5527	25.1773	26.9256	28.7802	29.5002	30.0720
Ballymena	20.8049	22.8552	24.2151	25.8849	26.5986	27.2042
Ballymoney	21.5659	22.4239	24.1347	25.9322	26.6575	27.4720
Banbridge	22.5907	23.4803	24.4075	25.6152	26.5109	27.2767

District Council	Non-Domestic District Rates					
	2007/ 2008 Pence	2008/ 2009 Pence	2009/ 2010 Pence	2010/ 2011 Pence	2011/ 2012 Pence	2012/ 2013 Pence
Belfast	21.1641	22.1853	23.7325	25.5849	26.3395	27.0236
Carrickfergus	21.8348	23.3575	25.2222	26.6534	27.2572	27.8548
Castlereagh	15.5642	15.8224	15.8221	16.3702	16.7748	17.7629
Coleraine	18.9978	20.1177	21.3192	22.3804	23.1818	23.8497
Cookstown	19.3003	20.2480	21.0292	21.5550	21.7788	22.0894
Craigavon	21.8620	22.3757	23.0338	23.4874	24.2849	24.7682
Derry	23.2804	24.4336	25.8003	27.0869	27.6961	28.3045
Down	21.7020	23.1531	23.7441	25.3514	25.3529	25.8586
Dungannon & South Tyrone	18.7035	19.9338	20.8161	20.8151	20.8151	20.8151
Fermanagh	14.7191	15.7343	17.0713	17.7340	17.9443	18.1148
Larne	21.9370	22.4881	22.4881	23.3696	24.0730	25.0360
Limavady	22.8353	24.3376	25.6732	27.6182	27.4233	27.7302
Lisburn	17.3615	17.6598	18.1180	18.4770	19.0232	19.7825
Magherafelt	17.5397	18.0474	18.5751	20.1292	20.5199	20.9291
Moyle	26.2998	28.7678	30.3867	30.3867	30.3867	31.0552
Newry & Mourne	19.5449	20.5026	21.8891	23.3873	23.3873	23.8534
Newtownabbey	22.1185	23.4281	23.8808	25.0494	25.6629	26.3905
North Down	16.5433	17.7803	19.2253	19.8071	20.3988	21.1110
Omagh	19.9548	20.9199	21.8609	22.5142	22.8189	23.2063
Strabane	19.9891	21.2820	22.8741	23.8690	23.4406	24.3621

Cyclists: Road Safety

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department has taken to improve road safety for cyclists; and whether he has any future plans in relation to this issue.

(AQW 8454/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The DOE has a statutory duty to promote road safety under Article 52 of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. The Department carries out this responsibility in several different ways. One of the ways it does this is through the Road Safety Education Service (RSES) which offers road safety advice and teaching materials to schools and young people. Although the Department has no specific remit to encourage cycle uptake through training and promotion or seek to improve cycling rates per se; the RSES does recognise the need to embed best practice in using the roads at this early stage as a road user. It is for this reason that the Cycling Proficiency Scheme (CPS), which is aimed mostly at children in Primary 7, although some schools do offer CPS to Primary 6 and occasionally Primary 5 children, is offered to all Primary schools in Northern Ireland. The scheme is active in approximately 580 primary schools with an average of 8,800 children trained each year at a cost of £84,000. CPS is regarded as part of the 'Life Long Learning' agenda in schools and equates to level 2 of the National Standards if on-road training is taken up by the school.

In October 2011 the Department launched the 'Be Cycle Aware' campaign, employing radio and bus rear advertising, in order to remind drivers and cyclists on the road to pay attention when sharing the road. The campaign consists of two radio adverts. One radio advert targets drivers as they travel in the car during daytime hours when they would be expected to share the road with cyclists. A second radio advert and bus rear advertising targets cyclists, reminding them of their vulnerability and the need to pay attention and stay safe on the roads.

Future plans in relation to road safety of cyclists include a review of the Cycling Proficiency Scheme. The focus of the review, which will be carried out by an independent body, will be on improving road safety as any programme delivered or supported by the RSES must have road safety as its main objective. It is anticipated that the independent review of CPS will be completed by the end of the year.

The Department will also continue to focus on cyclist in its future road safety campaigns as cyclists are considered to be in the vulnerable road user group.

'Protocol for the Care of the Historic Government Estate'

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment what steps his Department has taken to improve the care of the historic Government Estate.

(AQW 8616/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Over the last two years, my Department has reviewed the 2003 UK-wide 'Protocol for the Care of the Government Historic Estate' and produced a new, Northern Ireland, version which has been updated to follow current best practice.

The document sets out 12 points which Government Departments and Agencies should follow when managing heritage assets in their care. It also puts in place new reporting requirements, because this function has now been devolved to Northern Ireland.

This received Executive approval in late February 2012.

The Protocol will be subject to a formal launch later this spring, after which Departments will be expected to put it into action, with DOE co-ordinating the reporting and arranging a seminar or seminars, to alert other Departments to what is required.

Marine Bill: Management Issues

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of the Environment how the provisions in the Marine Bill will address the issue of marine management.

(AQO 1423/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Marine Bill, which I introduced to the Assembly last week, provides for marine plans, marine conservation zones, and further provision in relation to marine licensing for certain electricity works in the Northern Ireland inshore region.

These provisions together will provide the basis for the future, sustainable management of the North's marine environment, so that current and future generations can enjoy its social, economic and environmental benefits.

I remain committed to ensuring that the Bill is implemented in an integrated way so that those benefits can be realised in full.

I will also continue my conversations with Executive colleagues that the Bill should legislate for a Marine Management Organisation (MMO) as the best vehicle to manage and reconcile the many interests and needs of marine management.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Energy Efficiency Certificates: Public Buildings

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the level of funding spent on the acquisition of Energy Efficiency Certificates for all public buildings, since the requirement was introduced on 30 June 2008; (ii) which companies provide the service; and (iii) the process by which the companies were selected.

(AQW 6750/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): Since June 2008 a total of £562,004.24 has been spent on Energy Performance Certificates and Display Energy Certificates for public buildings across Northern Ireland.

The following organisations provided this service:

- In-house, qualified public sector staff
- Morris Estate Agents Ltd
- Faithful and Gould Building Surveying
- Commercial Surveying Hereford
- SSH Chartered Surveyors
- Ember Energy
- H & J Martin
- White, Young and Green
- Team (Energy) Ltd
- FMC Services Ltd
- Energy Matters NI Ltd
- Syracuse Associates
- Watts, Belfast
- Graham Hamilton
- SDS Energy Ltd

The selection of an energy assessor to provide this service is a matter for each public body. Where the service has not been provided by qualified (in-house) public sector staff, Departments have advised the following selection methods:

- Company selected initially from an approved list of tenders and subsequently by public procurement;
- Provided under a PFI agreement;
- Competitive tendering;
- Appointed by Estate Agent on sale of property;
- OGC Construction and Property Professional Services Framework Agreement;
- EU tender procurement procedure;
- Provided under a Service Level Agreement; and
- No formal competition where spend was below the DHSSPS threshold for expenditure control limits of £2,000.

Recruitment Agencies: DFP Spend

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the amount paid to recruitment agencies for (i) full-time; and (ii) part-time posts in his Department, and its arm's-length bodies, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 7649/11-15)

Mr Wilson:

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Full Time	£3,111,845	£2,344,541	£1,415,149
Part Time	£25,269	£29,059	£0

* Land and Property Services (LPS) were unable to break down their spend into full-time and part-time posts. The total spend for LPS has been provided as full-time posts.

Civil Service: Posts

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many Civil Service posts existed in his Department at (i) Administrative Assistant; (ii) Administrative Officer; (iii) Executive Officer 2; (iv) Executive Officer 1; (v) Staff Officer; (vi) Deputy Principal; (vii) Grade 7; and (viii) Grade 6 levels, at the beginning of (a) 2007; and (b) 2012, broken down by local Council area.

(AQW 7801/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The information requested is provided in the tables attached.

DFP STAFF IN POST (FULL TIME EQUIVALENT) GRADE 6 AND BELOW AT 1ST JANUARY 2007 BY WORK LOCATION DISTRICT COUNCIL

District Council	G6/G7	DP	SO	E01/ E0II	AO	AA	Indus- trial	Total
Ballymena	1	3	4	11	24	2	0	45
Belfast	220	327	356	505	486	206	29	2129
Castlereagh	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4
Coleraine	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Craigavon	3	5	7	10	30	4	0	59
Derry	5	11	8	35	77	21	0	157
Lisburn	2	6	7	7	10	5	0	37
Newtownabbey	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
North Down	28	56	48	61	61	20	0	274
Omagh	1	5	5	10	22	5	0	48
Location Unknown	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
Total	262	414	436	640	710	263	33	2758

Notes:

Data sourced from HRMS at 1st Jan 2007

Includes all DFP staff (Including staff on secondment)

Figures are Staff Full Time Equivalent (FTE)

Excludes staff on Career Break

The Department shows 164 vacancies in DFP at January 2007 however this figure cannot be broken down by grade and location and may also include SCS vacancies.

DFP STAFF IN POST (FULL TIME EQUIVALENT) GRADE 6 AND BELOW AT 1ST JANUARY 2012 BY WORK LOCATION DISTRICT COUNCIL

District Council	G6	G7	DP	SO	E01	E02	AO	AA	Indus- trial	Total
Ballymena	2	2	5	6	8	5	28	2	0	58
Belfast	82	176	390	432	398	376	620	190	16	2680
Castlereagh	0	1	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	7
Craigavon	1	1	6	10	11	6	31	2	0	68

District Council	G6	G7	DP	SO	E01	E02	AO	AA	Industrial	Total
Derry	1	5	15	13	21	27	76	8	0	166
Lisburn	0	1	4	8	6	1	7	3	0	30
North Down	1	28	53	39	16	28	28	7	0	200
Omagh	0	1	8	10	26	6	23	1	0	75
Downpatrick	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	6
Carrickfergus	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	0	0	4
Total	87	215	482	525	493	449	814	213	16	3294

Notes:

Data sourced from HRConnect at 1st Jan 2012

Includes all DFP staff (Including staff on secondment)

Figures are Staff Full Time Equivalent (FTE)

Excludes staff on Career Break

DFP Vacancies by analagous grade (G6 and below) by Work Location District Council which the Department are actively seeking to fill at 1st January 2012

District Council	G6	G7	DP	SO	E01	E02	AO	AA	Industrial	Total
Ballymena	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Belfast	0	4	9	26	7	5	10	6	0	67
Castlereagh	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Craigavon	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Derry	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Lisburn	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
North Down	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Omagh	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Downpatrick	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Carrickfergus	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	4	9	27	16	5	10	6	0	77

Employees: Re-hired following Retirement

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel pursuant to AQW 6026/11-15, to detail (i) when each person left the Department; (ii) the grade they were employed at when they left; (iii) the terms of their departure; (iv) the terms under which they were re-hired; (v) for how long they were re-hired, including hours worked; and (vi) the scale of pay on which they were re-hired.

(AQW 7969/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The information requested is provided in the table overleaf.

	Staff Member 1	Staff Member 2	Staff Member 3	Staff Member 4	Staff Member 5
(i) Date Left Department	August 2006	October 2003	June 2005	December 1999	February 2009
(ii) Grade When Left	Grade 5	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 7
(iii) Terms of Departure	Retirement	Retirement	Retirement	Retirement	Retirement
(iv) Terms Re-hired	To carry out ad-hoc FOI internal reviews.	To provide specialist legal advice and services.	To provide specialist legal advice and services.	Consultancy basis.	Consultancy basis.
(v) How Long Re hired	April 2008 - Ongoing (As required)	November 2008 - February 2009 (48.1 hours)	February 2006 - Ongoing (Contract due to terminate in June 2012) (20 hours per week)	May 2008 - January 2009 (262.5 hours)	March 2009 - January 2010 (180 hours)
(vi) Scale of Pay when Re-hired	£350-£700 per case, depending on complexity.	£67.57 per hour	£26.75 per hour	£24 per hour	£26.67 per hour

Unemployment: Holywood Electoral Area

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is the current level of unemployment in the Holywood electoral area.

(AQW 8162/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The official measure of unemployment is sourced from the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (LFS). However, as a sample survey the LFS is not designed to provide unemployment estimates at ward level.

The following table is sourced to the claimant count measure of unemployment. This shows the number of persons claiming unemployment related benefits in the two Holywood Wards at January 2012 and these figures as a percentage of the resident working age population.

Ward	Number of Claimants	Rate
Holywood Demesne	64	3.4
Holywood Priory	33	2.1
Total	97	2.8

Government Assets

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the Government assets which are currently on the open market for sale; (ii) those which have only been marketed for sale in this financial year to date; and (iii) what progress has been made on the sale of each asset.

(AQW 8184/11-15)

Mr Wilson: There are currently 58 surplus property assets for sale on the open market and they are listed on the Land & Property Services (LPS) website. Of these, 45 have been put on the market in this financial year.

Progress on the 58 sales is as follows:

- a) 11 properties are under offer;
- b) 11 properties are agreed for sale; and
- c) 36 properties have no offers.

Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises: DFP Spend

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much his Department has spent on conferences, away-days and team building exercises in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8189/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Expenditure by the Department of Finance and Personnel (including its executive agencies) on conferences, away-days and team building exercises in each of the last three years is set out in the table below.

Year	£'000
2008/09	252
2009/10	136
2010/11	105

Rating Valuations: Town Centres

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what factors prevent him from reviewing commercial rates in town centres before 2015.

(AQW 8234/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Rating valuations are the way of distributing the overall rating burden amongst individual ratepayers. Rates are unlike most other taxes, as the total amount to be raised is decided in advance and the individual bills are worked out afterwards, relative to the rateable value assessed on each property. To maintain consistency the values have to be established at a common and fixed valuation date. For this reason, all properties have to be assessed at the one time through a general revaluation and the legislation does not allow for partial revaluations.

To ensure that economic and social changes that occur over time are taken into account it is necessary to undertake revaluations every few years. Unfortunately, I had no option but to cancel the Revaluation scheduled for 2010. There was simply insufficient market evidence to establish a reliable new Valuation List of non domestic properties. That analysis also suggested that, if the revaluation proceeded, it would fall well short of international valuation standards.

The next revaluation is planned to take place in April 2015. This major exercise will take over two years to complete and therefore cannot be brought forward. It will allow Northern Ireland to align with the next revaluation of non domestic properties in the rest of the UK, which is due to occur then.

If an individual ratepayer is dissatisfied with the relativity of their net annual value assessment between revaluations they can ask for this to be reviewed.

Public Works: Tender Process

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what discussions he has had with representatives of small construction, surveying or architectural companies in relation to the tender processes for public works and the potential disadvantages for indigenous firms.

(AQW 8240/11-15)

Mr Wilson: My officials in Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) have had regular discussions with the construction industry, through engagement with the Construction Industry Forum for Northern Ireland (CIFNI), in relation to the tender process for works contracts. CIFNI embraces all sectors of the construction industry and includes representatives from main contractors, specialist subcontractors and consultants.

In 2011 for example, work taken forward under the auspices of CIFNI included a review of, and improvements to, the prequalification and tender processes for construction contracts.

More radical proposals for streamlining the procurement process for construction projects below the EU threshold, which currently stands at £4.3 million, are currently being refined and will be put to the Procurement Board for approval later this year. These proposals have been discussed with the Construction Employers Federation (CEF) which represents over 1,300 companies, the majority of which are small and medium sized businesses.

A consideration in all of these discussions has been safeguarding and promoting the interests of small and medium sized enterprises, which constitute the bulk of our indigenous firms involved in construction. Specific measures, such as reducing the complexity of prequalification questionnaires; using random selection to generate tender lists; and tendering on the basis of price alone, will be of particular interest to smaller firms.

Fuel: DFP Spend

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much his Department, and its agencies, have spent on fuel in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8251/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Vehicle and plant fuel expenditure by the Department of Finance and Personnel (including its executive agencies) in each of the last five years is as follows:

Year	£'000
2007/08	78
2008/09	81
2009/10	72
2010/11	77
2011/12 (up to 31 January 2012)	33

Stormont Estate: Entrance Security

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the rationale for having security at the entrances to the Stormont Estate; (ii) the annual cost of the security; and (iii) the number of people who have been refused entry to the Stormont Estate in each of the last four years.

(AQW 8264/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Security Guards at the entrances to the Stormont Estate control vehicular access to ensure a safe and secure working environment for all users of the Estate.

In 2010-11, the cost of the security at the entrances to the Stormont Estate was £573,696.

Details of the number of people who have been refused entry over the past four years are not available.

Suicide: Deaths from 2001 to 2011

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in each year between 2001 and 2011, to detail, for each constituency, the percentage of people who died through suicide, broken down by (i) age; and (ii) gender.

(AQW 8323/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The tables below give the percentage of deaths registered due to 'suicide and self-inflicted injury'¹ or 'undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted'² by Assembly Area by the five categories (a) persons, (b) males, (c) females, (d) persons aged under 45 and (e) persons aged 45 or more.

Statistics are presented for each year between 2003 and 2011(Quarter 1–Quarter 3^P). Detailed Assembly Area mortality statistics for the years 2001 and 2002 are unavailable.

1 International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision codes X60-X84, Y87.0

2 International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision codes Y10-Y34, Y87.2

P Provisional Data

Tables: Registered deaths due to 'suicide and self-inflicted injury' or 'undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted' as a percentage of deaths within each area, 2003 to 2011(Q1-Q3P) for

(A) ... - PERSONS

Area Name	Registration Year								2011 Q1- Q3 ^P
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	
Belfast East	0.2	0.4	1.1	1.0	1.3	1.0	1.7	2.3	1.3
Belfast North	1.7	1.7	1.5	2.5	2.0	2.3	2.4	2.3	2.6
Belfast South	1.0	1.2	1.8	1.8	1.4	1.7	1.5	2.5	2.3
Belfast West	1.6	1.0	1.4	2.5	2.6	3.3	3.2	2.4	4.1
East Antrim	0.7	0.4	1.1	1.5	1.7	1.6	1.2	1.1	1.2
East Londonderry	1.3	0.9	0.7	1.9	1.7	1.9	2.2	2.4	1.7
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	0.7	0.9	2.3	1.9	2.2	1.5	2.3	1.7	2.3
Foyle	1.0	1.4	1.6	3.4	1.7	2.8	2.3	3.4	2.1
Lagan Valley	0.5	0.8	1.9	1.6	0.5	1.1	0.8	3.0	2.1
Mid Ulster	0.7	0.8	3.0	3.0	1.8	2.1	2.2	1.4	2.2
Newry and Armagh	0.9	1.2	1.9	1.9	2.3	3.6	2.2	1.8	2.6
North Antrim	1.2	1.0	1.1	1.9	0.9	1.1	1.3	2.3	1.4
North Down	0.4	0.7	0.8	0.5	0.9	1.0	1.0	1.4	0.9
South Antrim	0.9	0.8	2.0	2.1	1.0	1.4	2.0	1.8	2.2
South Down	1.5	1.2	1.4	2.0	1.5	1.7	0.8	2.6	1.4

Area Name	Registration Year								
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011 Q1-Q3 ^P
Strangford	1.0	1.3	1.6	2.0	1.5	1.3	0.9	2.2	1.7
Upper Bann	1.8	1.4	1.3	1.5	2.4	1.7	1.8	2.0	2.8
West Tyrone	0.7	1.3	1.0	3.4	2.1	3.1	2.5	2.0	1.9
Northern Ireland	1.0	1.0	1.5	2.0	1.7	1.9	1.8	2.2	2.1

(B) ... - MALES

Area Name	Registration Year								
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011 Q1-Q3 ^P
Belfast East	0.4	0.2	1.9	1.3	2.0	1.7	3.3	3.7	1.7
Belfast North	3.2	2.2	2.6	3.6	2.7	3.5	3.6	3.0	4.2
Belfast South	1.8	1.8	2.3	2.8	1.9	2.2	2.5	3.9	4.7
Belfast West	2.3	1.9	2.2	4.0	4.1	6.3	5.1	4.0	6.7
East Antrim	1.1	0.8	2.1	2.6	2.3	2.9	2.5	1.8	2.1
East Londonderry	1.8	1.0	0.9	2.5	2.5	3.0	4.0	4.3	2.3
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	0.8	0.7	3.9	2.6	2.7	2.8	4.1	2.4	3.1
Foyle	1.7	1.5	2.6	5.8	3.1	3.6	3.0	5.1	2.3
Lagan Valley	0.8	1.1	2.9	2.3	0.9	1.7	1.1	4.0	3.3
Mid Ulster	1.4	1.6	5.1	5.1	3.1	3.5	4.4	1.7	3.3
Newry and Armagh	1.6	2.7	2.8	3.4	2.3	5.5	3.4	3.1	3.9
North Antrim	1.8	1.5	1.7	3.7	1.7	2.3	2.4	4.2	2.1
North Down	0.7	1.2	1.2	1.0	1.2	1.5	1.5	3.1	1.4
South Antrim	1.6	1.2	2.9	3.1	1.6	2.2	2.3	3.2	4.2
South Down	2.5	2.3	2.0	2.9	2.2	1.8	1.4	3.7	1.8
Strangford	1.9	1.2	2.6	3.3	2.4	2.1	1.2	3.8	2.8
Upper Bann	2.7	2.5	1.9	2.7	3.8	2.7	2.1	2.5	3.7
West Tyrone	0.9	1.9	1.8	5.6	2.9	4.5	4.8	3.5	3.3
Northern Ireland	1.6	1.5	2.4	3.2	2.4	3.0	3.0	3.4	3.1

(C) ... - FEMALES

Area Name	Registration Year								
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011 Q1-Q3 ^P
Belfast East	-	0.6	0.4	0.8	0.7	0.4	0.4	1.1	1.0
Belfast North	0.3	1.2	0.5	1.6	1.3	1.2	1.3	1.8	1.0
Belfast South	0.4	0.6	1.5	1.0	1.0	1.2	0.6	1.2	0.3
Belfast West	1.0	0.2	0.6	1.1	1.1	0.4	1.6	0.9	1.9
East Antrim	0.3	-	0.2	0.5	1.2	0.5	-	0.5	0.3
East Londonderry	0.8	0.8	0.5	1.4	0.8	0.8	0.3	0.5	1.1
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	0.7	1.1	0.3	1.2	1.5	0.2	0.5	0.8	1.6
Foyle	0.3	1.3	0.6	1.1	0.3	1.9	1.6	1.6	1.9
Lagan Valley	0.2	0.5	1.0	1.0	0.2	0.7	0.5	2.1	1.2
Mid Ulster	-	-	0.6	0.6	0.3	0.6	-	1.2	1.2
Newry and Armagh	0.3	-	1.0	0.5	2.3	1.6	1.0	0.5	1.3
North Antrim	0.7	0.5	0.5	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.6
North Down	0.2	0.2	0.4	-	0.6	0.7	0.6	0.2	0.5
South Antrim	0.3	0.3	1.0	1.0	0.6	0.3	1.6	0.5	-
South Down	0.5	-	0.8	1.2	0.8	1.5	0.3	1.5	1.1
Strangford	0.3	1.4	0.8	0.8	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.8	0.8
Upper Bann	1.0	0.2	0.8	0.2	1.1	0.7	1.6	1.4	1.9
West Tyrone	0.6	0.7	-	1.2	1.2	1.6	0.5	0.4	0.4
Northern Ireland	0.4	0.6	0.6	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.7	1.0	1.0

(D) ... - PERSONS AGED UNDER 45

Area Name	Registration Year								
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011 Q1-Q3 ^P
Belfast East	2.9	5.7	12.0	2.8	11.1	16.3	26.8	29.8	22.2
Belfast North	18.6	25.6	15.2	20.7	23.9	27.1	21.1	31.1	37.5
Belfast South	19.5	14.7	20.9	23.4	25.0	16.7	22.5	17.8	41.4
Belfast West	17.5	9.4	10.9	32.2	20.0	32.1	37.3	23.8	41.7
East Antrim	11.4	10.5	13.5	21.9	10.5	20.9	15.8	15.8	16.7
East Londonderry	14.7	8.7	4.5	25.6	17.9	12.3	25.0	25.5	25.0

Area Name	Registration Year								
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011 Q1-Q3 ^P
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	5.0	10.7	10.8	9.0	18.0	13.2	16.3	15.6	15.8
Foyle	9.4	14.0	16.9	24.3	15.4	27.6	17.6	18.9	14.0
Lagan Valley	3.6	8.9	17.1	25.0	3.1	22.2	11.1	28.6	25.9
Mid Ulster	11.5	2.6	21.6	21.2	13.0	17.8	22.7	19.4	22.2
Newry and Armagh	10.5	5.7	18.9	14.1	17.2	32.8	13.2	11.7	22.0
North Antrim	15.6	12.2	7.5	23.9	7.3	10.2	14.0	23.8	16.1
North Down	-	16.1	10.8	6.3	3.6	25.0	13.9	28.6	14.8
South Antrim	10.3	3.4	18.2	16.7	10.4	6.1	19.6	24.3	29.4
South Down	11.1	4.8	13.0	22.9	14.6	12.9	6.1	17.9	14.7
Strangford	12.1	10.9	24.3	26.8	17.1	15.8	11.1	25.6	15.4
Upper Bann	18.0	13.6	9.8	18.2	22.0	19.6	21.7	19.0	27.3
West Tyrone	10.5	17.9	11.4	35.8	18.0	18.2	14.9	19.2	14.3
Northern Ireland	12.0	10.8	14.4	20.8	15.8	20.4	18.9	21.8	23.4

(E) ... - PERSONS AGED 45 OR MORE

Area Name	Registration Year								
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011 Q1-Q3 ^P
Belfast East	0.1	0.2	0.5	0.9	1.0	0.3	0.6	1.0	0.3
Belfast North	0.8	0.7	0.7	1.5	0.5	0.4	1.1	0.6	0.7
Belfast South	0.2	0.6	0.8	0.6	0.3	1.0	0.5	1.6	0.5
Belfast West	0.3	0.1	0.6	0.4	1.0	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.8
East Antrim	0.1	0.1	0.4	0.7	1.3	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4
East Londonderry	0.6	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.7	1.0	0.7	0.7	0.5
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	0.5	0.2	1.4	1.3	1.1	0.9	1.4	0.8	1.4
Foyle	0.3	0.3	0.2	1.1	0.4	0.6	0.7	1.6	1.0
Lagan Valley	0.4	0.3	1.0	0.6	0.4	0.1	0.4	1.3	1.0
Mid Ulster	0.2	0.7	1.4	1.5	1.0	1.1	0.7	0.3	0.7
Newry and Armagh	0.4	0.9	0.7	0.9	1.2	1.4	1.4	1.1	1.2
North Antrim	0.4	0.4	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.4	1.2	0.6

Area Name	Registration Year								
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011 Q1-Q3 ^P
North Down	0.5	0.1	0.4	0.2	0.8	0.3	0.5	0.6	0.3
South Antrim	0.3	0.6	0.7	1.0	0.3	1.1	0.5	0.6	1.3
South Down	0.6	1.0	0.6	0.7	0.6	0.7	0.4	1.4	0.6
Strangford	0.4	0.6	0.4	0.5	0.8	0.4	0.3	0.9	1.0
Upper Bann	0.5	0.7	0.8	0.5	0.7	0.5	0.4	0.8	1.0
West Tyrone	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.7	0.9	2.1	1.6	0.4	0.9
Northern Ireland	0.4	0.4	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.7	0.9	0.8

P Provisional Data

Unemployment: 2001 to 2011

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of people of working age who were (i) unemployed; and (ii) unemployed for more than one year, in each year between 2001 and 2011, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 8326/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The official measure of unemployment is sourced from the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (LFS). However, the most recent year for which long-term unemployment estimates at constituency level are currently available from this source is 2010.

The following tables therefore are sourced to the claimant count measure of unemployment. Table 1 shows the annual average of all claimants by Parliamentary Constituency Area from 2001 to 2011. Table 2 shows the annual average of long-term (claiming more than one year) claimants by Parliamentary Constituency Area from 2001 to 2011.

TABLE 1. ANNUAL AVERAGE CLAIMANT COUNT BY PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY AREA 2001-2011

Parliamentary Constituency Area	Annual Average Claimant Count										
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Belfast East	1,679	1,483	1,657	1,420	1,195	1,172	992	1,025	1,945	2,451	2,699
Belfast North	2,719	2,563	2,462	2,153	2,654	2,679	2,310	2,416	3,758	4,442	4,923
Belfast South	2,042	1,998	1,899	1,629	1,554	1,468	1,361	1,479	2,497	3,096	3,281
Belfast West	4,111	3,875	3,395	3,197	3,257	3,295	3,021	3,204	4,657	4,990	5,092
East Antrim	1,939	1,994	1,891	1,732	1,213	1,135	947	1,046	2,112	2,314	2,337
East Londonderry	2,349	2,033	2,015	1,854	1,910	1,682	1,412	1,782	3,160	3,482	3,546
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	2,284	2,127	2,009	1,643	1,403	1,321	1,145	1,309	2,570	2,874	3,061
Foyle	4,478	4,035	3,717	3,564	3,300	3,335	2,809	2,978	4,352	4,993	5,451
Lagan Valley	1,150	1,071	1,033	932	742	779	684	828	1,689	1,937	2,102
Mid Ulster	1,333	1,153	986	876	873	853	698	1,051	2,621	2,826	2,752
Newry & Armagh	2,497	2,210	2,117	1,849	1,595	1,422	1,337	1,536	3,076	3,998	4,326
North Antrim	1,986	1,770	1,525	1,397	1,317	1,386	1,161	1,434	2,621	2,922	3,066
North Down	1,520	1,352	1,367	1,177	1,079	1,006	901	927	1,586	1,930	2,064
South Antrim	1,427	1,505	1,398	1,111	946	964	838	969	1,930	2,195	2,207
South Down	2,048	1,907	1,818	1,552	1,338	1,201	1,045	1,400	2,776	3,344	3,469
Strangford	1,504	1,347	1,484	1,422	1,148	1,069	939	1,031	1,779	2,106	2,310
Upper Bann	1,840	1,680	1,591	1,371	1,234	1,295	1,175	1,559	3,039	3,527	3,735
West Tyrone	2,662	2,419	2,327	2,080	1,948	1,888	1,630	1,881	2,946	3,385	3,491
Northern Ireland	39,568	36,522	34,691	30,959	28,706	27,950	24,405	27,855	49,114	56,812	59,912

Data from 2005 to 2011 uses the latest Parliamentary Constituency Area boundaries introduced at the last general election.

Data from 2001 to 2004 uses the previous boundaries.

TABLE 2. LONG-TERM ANNUAL AVERAGE CLAIMANT COUNT BY PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY AREA 2001-2011

Parliamentary Constituency Area	Long-term (Claiming Over 12 Months) Annual Average Claimant Count										
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Belfast East	475	290	340	360	205	190	175	140	235	535	630
Belfast North	920	700	590	575	615	645	525	420	570	940	1,150
Belfast South	475	415	300	320	250	250	265	270	330	620	730
Belfast West	1,645	1,355	885	895	930	840	805	730	925	1,290	1,250
East Antrim	460	355	390	345	220	195	150	115	225	450	440
East Londonderry	615	455	450	430	405	315	225	200	355	775	750
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	845	685	610	560	385	340	305	195	345	660	685
Foyle	1,665	1,150	730	910	675	675	635	490	680	1,155	1,355
Lagan Valley	230	195	150	160	105	115	100	75	155	375	420
Mid Ulster	320	210	190	180	160	155	105	95	270	660	570
Newry & Armagh	840	610	535	550	440	345	290	230	445	1,135	1,455
North Antrim	505	380	300	295	235	235	200	175	330	665	655
North Down	355	270	220	240	200	185	180	135	225	455	500
South Antrim	315	290	280	255	175	180	155	140	225	490	475
South Down	530	445	400	375	290	255	200	170	365	855	900
Strangford	390	310	270	325	260	255	210	150	240	455	505
Upper Bann	505	375	310	300	175	190	180	150	380	940	1,030
West Tyrone	1,065	785	680	650	445	460	360	350	510	870	940
Northern Ireland	12,160	9,280	7,625	7,730	6,165	5,825	5,065	4,225	6,810	13,330	14,435

Data from 2005 to 2011 uses the latest Parliamentary Constituency Area boundaries introduced at the last general election.

Data from 2001 to 2004 uses the previous boundaries.

Benefits: Failure to Claim

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of economically inactive people who did not claim benefits in each year since 2006, broken down by gender.

(AQW 8351/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Estimates of the numbers of economically inactive people who did not claim benefits are sourced from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). Please note, that annual data are available for the years 2006 to 2010, whilst the most recent data available for 2011 are for the quarter October – December 2011.

The requested breakdown of the number of economically inactive people, who did not claim benefits in each year since 2006, is shown in the table overleaf.

TABLE 1

Period	Male	Female	Total
2006	56,000	62,000	118,000
2007	50,000	64,000	114,000
2008	56,000	67,000	123,000
2009	64,000	69,000	134,000
2010	60,000	72,000	132,000
October - December 2011	60,000	75,000	134,000

Source: Labour Force Survey

Note: LFS questions on State Benefits apply to all survey respondents that are aged between 16 and 69.

Unemployment: Long-term Estimates

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people in each constituency are currently classified as long term unemployed.

(AQW 8368/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The official measure of unemployment is sourced from the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (LFS). However, the most recent year for which long-term unemployment estimates at constituency level are currently available from this source is 2010.

The following table therefore is sourced to the claimant count measure of unemployment and gives the number of long-term (claiming over one year) claimants by Parliamentary Constituency Area for January 2012.

Parliamentary Constituency Area	Claiming for over 12 months
Belfast East	655
Belfast North	1,315
Belfast South	735
Belfast West	1,320
East Antrim	490
East Londonderry	770
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	750

Parliamentary Constituency Area	Claiming for over 12 months
Foyle	1,680
Lagan Valley	460
Mid Ulster	535
Newry & Armagh	1,485
North Antrim	670
North Down	465
South Antrim	425
South Down	910
Strangford	535
Upper Bann	1,030
West Tyrone	1,015
Northern Ireland	15,230

Small Business Rate Relief Scheme

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many non-domestic ratepayers have benefitted from the Small Business Rates Relief Scheme.

(AQW 8377/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As at 19th February 2012, a total of 24,217 non-domestic premises have benefited from the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme.

Fuel Smuggling

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the cost of fuel smuggling to the economy in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8434/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Fuel smuggling in Northern Ireland imposes a revenue loss to the UK Exchequer and adversely affects local fuel retailers. HM Revenue and Customs take the lead on fuel smuggling and fraud, working closely with the Irish authorities. The Organised Crime Task Force, which is chaired by the Northern Ireland Justice Minister, estimated in its 2011 threat assessment that there is an annual tax loss of £200 million from fuel fraud and legitimate cross-border fuel shopping. This is significantly down from a 2005 estimate of £280 million – likely due to changes in exchange and duty rates, which have made smuggling less profitable.

I would suggest however, that for further clarification you may wish to redirect your question to the Justice Minister or the Organised Crime Task Force.

Actual Penny Product

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the Actual Penny Product for each council in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8453/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The information requested is provided in the table overleaf.

Land & Property Services is responsible for undertaking the calculations and notifying District Councils of the outcome. The calculations were undertaken in accordance with statutory formula set out in The Rates Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007 (as amended)

APP BY DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA FOR THE RATING YEARS 2006 - 2010

District		2006-07 £	2007-08 £	2008-09 £	2009-10 £	2010-11 £
Antrim	01	584,627	614,156	569,919	642,430	646,081
Ards	02	698,159	700,399	706,778	720,272	726,054
Armagh City & District	03	472,546	475,371	472,455	488,020	489,205
Ballymena	04	686,783	699,864	709,585	707,668	722,249
Ballymoney	05	212,292	211,620	211,450	218,374	220,837
Banbridge	06	367,728	390,502	400,620	397,150	404,706
Belfast	07	4,671,246	4,598,581	4,813,810	4,832,035	4,755,670
Carrickfergus	08	361,494	359,052	373,037	370,924	372,238
Castlereagh	09	771,660	783,677	782,565	825,790	800,491
Coleraine	10	719,129	720,844	743,370	737,006	740,909
Cookstown	11	292,264	303,621	313,452	323,310	333,603
Craigavon	12	881,036	913,211	915,157	941,523	951,110
Down	13	604,010	609,500	612,179	633,185	639,308
Dungannon & South Tyrone	14	437,377	453,909	459,610	478,443	488,253
Fermanagh	15	591,114	600,421	625,063	638,770	647,920
Larne	16	345,002	344,809	349,565	363,128	369,448
Limavady	17	265,155	275,196	259,635	267,139	275,793
Lisburn	18	1,224,311	1,266,895	1,271,568	1,308,294	1,306,830
Derry	19	1,185,459	1,162,545	1,187,265	1,190,854	1,202,321
Magherafelt	20	311,200	333,581	330,144	344,069	343,789
Moyle	21	142,672	143,426	145,539	147,690	149,099
Newry	22	920,303	920,657	925,132	956,018	977,363
Newtownabbey	23	873,447	896,367	932,208	923,631	927,093
North Down	24	1,042,466	988,951	1,047,698	1,059,936	1,045,926
Omagh	25	499,071	513,132	514,390	519,230	537,751
Strabane	26	282,822	284,395	295,684	306,188	313,568
Total		19,443,371	19,564,680	19,967,878	20,341,074	20,387,617

Figures may not add up due to rounding

Suicide: North Down

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of incidents of suicide per ward in the North Down area in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8479/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The table below gives the number of deaths registered due to either 'suicide and self-inflicted injury'¹ or 'undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted'² by ward of the deceased within North Down Local Government District, 2006 to 2010.

To limit the possibility of disclosure of sensitive information on deceased individuals, statistics are presented for the combined five year period only.

- 1 International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision codes X60-X84, Y87.0
- 2 International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision codes Y10-Y34, Y87.2

REGISTERED DEATHS DUE TO 'SUICIDE AND SELF-INFLICTED INJURY' OR 'UNDETERMINED INJURY WHETHER ACCIDENTALLY OR PURPOSEFULLY INFLICTED' BY WARD WITHIN NORTH DOWN LOCAL GOVERNMENT DISTRICT, 2006-2010.

Area Name	Number of 'suicides' registered between 2006 and 2010
Ballycrochan	3
Ballyholme	2
Ballymacconnell	1
Ballymagee	1
Bangor Castle	0
Bloomfield	5
Broadway	2
Bryansburn	1
Churchill	2
Clandeboye	1
Conlig	1
Craigavad	2
Crawfordsburn	2
Cultra	0
Dufferin	5
Groomsport	2
Harbour	1
Hollywood Demesne	0
Hollywood Priory	2
Loughview	3
Princetown	0
Rathgael	1

Area Name	Number of 'suicides' registered between 2006 and 2010
Silverstream	1
Spring Hill	1
Whitehill	0
North Down Local Government District	39

Research and Development: Industry Spend

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the (i) value; and (ii) percentage of the total Research and Development spend in each of the last three years, broken down by industry sector. **(AQW 8502/11-15)**

Mr Wilson: Total Research and Development (R&D) consists of R&D in Business, Higher Education and Government. Table 1 overleaf presents Northern Ireland Research and Development (R&D) spend, in cash terms, for the last three years, 2008 to 2010, and also the percentage of Business Expenditure on Research and Development (BERD) within the industry sectors of Manufacturing and Services & Other. Further breakdown is not available due to confidentiality constraints.

TABLE 1: EXPENDITURE ON TOTAL R&D IN NORTHERN IRELAND, 2008-2010

	2008 (£million)	2009 (£million)	2010 (£million)
Total	344.0	482.8	521.4
Higher Education	144.2	143.0	161.8
Government	15.9	16.1	15.6
Business Expenditure on Research and Development (BERD)	183.9	323.7	344.0
BERD within Manufacturing	114.3 (62%)	228.9 (71%)	245.8 (71%)
BERD within Services & Other	69.7 (38%)	94.8 (29%)	98.2 (29%)

Source: NI R&D Surveys, NISRA

Research and Development: Top 20 Investors

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the top 20 investors in Research and Development (R&D); and what percentage each of this spend represents of the total R&D spend. **(AQW 8503/11-15)**

Mr Wilson: Information on individual companies is not available due to confidentiality constraints. However, Total Business Expenditure on Research and Development (BERD) in Northern Ireland was £344.0 million in 2010, of which £243.8 million (71%) was spent by the top 20 companies engaging in Research and Development activities.

Research and Development: Percentage of GDP

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the amount spent on Research and Development in each of the last ten years; and (ii) the percentage of the estimated GDP that it represents.

(AQW 8504/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Total Research and Development (R&D) consists of R&D in Business, Higher Education and Government. Table 1 overleaf presents Northern Ireland Total Research and Development in cash terms and as a percentage of Northern Ireland Gross Value Added (GVA). Regional GVA data is the measure used as regional Gross Domestic Product (GDP) measures are not available.

TABLE 1: EXPENDITURE ON TOTAL R&D IN NORTHERN IRELAND, 2001-2010

	Total R&D (£millions)	R&D as %GVA
2001	263.8	1.3%
2002	272.5	1.3%
2003	261.8	1.2%
2004	277.4	1.2%
2005	314.1	1.2%
2006	330.8	1.2%
2007	351.1	1.2%
2008	344.0	1.2%
2009	482.8	1.8%
2010	521.4	1.9%

Source: NI R&D Surveys, NISRA; Regional GVA data, ONS.

Youth Contract

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much funding will be allocated to the Executive, as a result of the Barnett Consequentials, following the announcement of the £1 billion Youth Contract by the Westminster Government; and how much of that funding will be allocated to the Department for Employment and Learning.

(AQW 8613/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Department of Work and Pensions received a Resource DEL allocation of £942.7 million in respect of the Youth Contract. This was offset by an assumed Resource DEL saving of £65 million, resulting in a net addition of £877.7 million over the three years from 2012-13 to 2014-15.

Northern Ireland received a Barnett consequential on both the allocation and savings, resulting in a net addition of £26.5 million to the Northern Ireland Block over the three year period.

Barnett consequentials are unhypothecated and, as such, it is for the Executive to determine how any such funding is to be used within Northern Ireland. The Executive will consider the allocation of this funding in due course.

Funding: Cross-departmental Working

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether current legislation permits Departments to pool financial and/or staff resources when working on cross-departmental issues.

(AQW 8694/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Administrative arrangements between departments in support of cross-departmental working is not directly covered by legislation, but should reflect the purposes for which funding has been voted by the Assembly.

Consultants: NIAO Spend

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much the Northern Ireland Audit Office has spent on external consultants in each of the last three financial years.

(AQO 1437/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Unfortunately I am not in a position to provide details of the external consultancy projects undertaken by the Northern Ireland Audit Office. As Members will be aware my Department requests returns from all Departments on an annual basis as recommended by the Public Accounts Committee. This information is then collated and published in DFP's Annual Compliance Report on the Use of External Consultants. My Department not only requests this information from the 12 Ministerial Departments, but also the other non-ministerial Departments, that is: the Food Standards Agency; the Utility Regulator; The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission; the Assembly Ombudsman and Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints; and the Northern Ireland Audit Office. Unfortunately on each occasion when the Northern Ireland Audit Office has been asked for details of its external consultancy projects it has declined to provide it. I fully understand that the Audit Office is not bound by the Executive's controls and I completely respect its independence, however I don't believe that making this information available would compromise the Audit Office's independence, but rather it would demonstrate openness and transparency.

UK Credit Rating

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the impact on the Northern Ireland economy if the UK loses its AAA credit rating in the next eighteen months.

(AQO 1439/11-15)

Mr Wilson: If the UK were to lose its AAA rating this could potentially increase borrowing costs for the UK Government, businesses and consumers. A particular concern would be the impact on investment by firms, where higher borrowing rates would deter investment to grow businesses and create new jobs.

However, the scale of the impact on the economy would depend on whether or not the other credit rating agencies follow suit. In practice, downgrades from AAA ratings tend to result in small changes to yields, given that AA rated debt is still considered low risk.

Furthermore, in its statement Moody's Investor Service identified structural strengths in the UK economy and the Government's current fiscal consolidation programme as reasons for maintaining the AAA rating. The agency expects the UK economy to eventually return to its trend growth rate of 2.5 per cent.

Asset Management Unit: Update

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the sale of surplus assets by Departments.

(AQO 1440/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I presume that the Member is referring to progress made by the Asset Management Unit (AMU) in identifying assets for disposal against their £100 million target over the four year Budget period.

In terms of this financial year, the AMU was charged with delivering £10 million of additional capital receipts. At the time of the January Monitoring round, the AMU advised that it had achieved contractually completed sales of £1.3 million so far in this financial year. It also advised that there was potential to realise further sales in 2011-12 but that uncertainty remained in terms of these additional receipts. Any receipts not realised in this financial year will be added to next year's figure to ensure the integrity of the overall £100 million target.

The profile of the remaining AMU receipts (£15m/£25m/£50m) is skewed towards the end of the Budget period to allow sufficient time to plan for delivery. This will also allow the local property market to recover sufficiently to realise value from our surplus assets. AMU is currently working with departments to identify and plan these asset disposals. My officials are also assisting in this task.

Barnett Formula

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he has had any discussions with the Exchequer, in the last year, about the future of the Barnett Formula.

(AQO 1441/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I am not aware of any Government plans to review the Barnett formula and therefore I have not had any specific discussions with Treasury Ministers over the last year about its future.

However, I do recognise that the potential transfer of further fiscal powers to the devolved areas, particularly in the context of the ongoing Scotland debate, does raise the issue of how public expenditure is administered and allocated to the regions in this context.

That said, I have no plans to instigate any discussions in this regard and would approach any debate on this issue very cautiously. For example, some would argue that public expenditure should be allocated on the basis of need, but we must also recognise the potential for a lack of

objectivity in constructing a replacement needs based formula. The Calman Commission highlighted these difficulties.

Social Clauses: Government Contracts

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he has provided a definition of 'social clauses' to other Departments and their agencies, for use in the drafting of contracts.

(AQO 1442/11-15)

Mr Wilson: There is currently no standard definition of social clauses. However significant work has been carried out by Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) in the development of clauses covering a range of social requirements specifically related to the construction industry, including the provision of employment and training opportunities as well as requirements relating to essential skills training, health and safety and fair treatment for suppliers.

CPD is also developing guidance for procurement practitioners in CPD and Centres of Procurement Expertise (CoPEs) on the use of social clauses linked to the subject matter or performance of the contract. This guidance will include a range of model contract clauses which can be easily adapted for use in contract specifications and as contract performance conditions.

Cost of Division

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline what action his Department will take to tackle the cost of division following the assurance, which he gave to the Assembly on 13 February 2012, that the Executive would address this issue.

(AQO 1443/11-15)

Mr Wilson: One of the key commitments in the draft Programme for Government is to build a stronger, more united and diverse community which can only be achieved when we work to reduce segregation and separation.

As Finance Minister I always urge Ministers to look at how their Departments spend money and eradicate duplication where possible.

Economic Inactivity: 18-25 Age Bracket

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what funding will be made available to Departments to encourage people in the 18-25 years age bracket who are economically inactive.

(AQO 1445/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I recognise that there is an issue with regard to the number of young people who are economically inactive.

Regarding youth unemployment, on 9 February 2012 the Minister for Employment and Learning tabled a paper of new support measures aimed at this group. These measures are currently in development by his Department and the Minister has also indicated he plans to present a final draft strategy to the Executive in March for dealing with those young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs).

These proposals will need to be considered alongside competing priorities in determining future funding allocations by the Executive.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Dermatology: Funding in NHSCT

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, for each of the last three years, to provide a breakdown of the funding allocated to the Dermatology Departments in hospitals in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area, compared with the Dermatology Departments in hospitals in other Trust areas.

(AQW 8194/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): It is not possible to provide a breakdown of the funding allocated to dermatology departments, as trusts do not allocate funding directly to specific departmental areas in a manner that captures all the resources for this speciality. For example, dermatology treatment can be provided in a number of clinical areas within each hospital or trust.

However, the total expenditure of dermatology activity delivered by dermatology speciality consultants within each trust is contained in the following table:

HSC Trust	2010/11 £m	2009/10 £m	2008/09 £m
Northern	1.5	2.3	2.0
Southern	3.3	3.4	3.1
South Eastern	1.5	1.3	1.4
Western	1.8	2.2	2.0
Belfast	4.8	5.6	5.0
Total	13.0	14.8	13.5

Cancer: Support in Rural Areas

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures are in place to support cancer patients in rural areas who need to travel long distances to access treatment.

(AQW 8216/11-15)

Mr Poots: In May 2011 I announced that the development of a radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin Hospital would proceed. When the new unit opens in 2016 it will represent a real improvement in access to radiotherapy. Radiotherapy patients from rural areas in the northwest will no longer need to travel to Belfast for treatment.

In addition I can advise that the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) Patient Community Service (PCS) is available to cancer patients who have a clinical need for transport confirmed by a clinician. It offers pre-booked non-emergency transport for patients attending outpatient appointments and those being discharged from or transferred between hospitals.

For those patients for whom PCS is not considered appropriate or is not available, HSC Trusts each operate various alternatives, which include rural transport schemes, volunteer driver services, local charities, minibus and taxi. Patients may also, at times, prefer to travel with friends or family.

Physiotherapy Graduates: Employment

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 3634/11-15, what action his Department is taking to combat the level of unemployment amongst physiotherapy graduates.

(AQW 8238/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department carries out workforce reviews for each clinical professional group, including physiotherapy. This provides information to support decision making on the commissioned numbers required to support service delivery. For 2010/11, the commissioned number was reduced by 10 to 59 and has remained at this level for 2011/12 to reflect both the current and projected level of demand for newly qualified staff.

Operating Department Practitioners: Number

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Operating Department Practitioners are working in each Health and Social Care Trust area; and at what salary band they are employed.

(AQW 8304/11-15)

Mr Poots: As at February 2012, there were ten Operating Department Practitioners employed within Northern Ireland Health and Social Care (nine within the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust and one within Western Health and Social Care Trust). All of these were employed at Pay Band 5 level.

Since October 2004, it has been a requirement to be registered with the Health Professions Council to work as an Operating Department Practitioner as this is a protected title by law.

Operating Department Practitioners: Vacancies

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many vacancies for Operating Department Practitioners have been advertised in the last 24 months by each Health and Social Care Trust; and at what salary band were they advertised.

(AQW 8305/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is given in the table below.

Number of vacancies for Operating Department Practitioners within Northern Ireland Health and Social Care by Trust advertised since February 2010

Trust	Pay Band	Headcount
Belfast	-	0
Northern	-	0
South Eastern	5	1
Southern	-	0
Western	See note 3 below	

Source: Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Trusts

Notes:

- All of the above staff are employed at Pay Band 5 level.
- South Eastern Trust advised that they advertised one vacancy for Pay Band 5 Operating Department Practitioner in April 2010.

- 3 The Western Trust advised that they advertise for a waiting list jointly for Theatre Nurses / Operating Department Practitioners at Pay Band 5 level in order to maximise the number of suitable candidates who interested in working within theatres. The waiting list is used to fill all vacancies that arise within theatres over a 12 month period. However all of the posts appointed in the last 24 months have been recruited as Band 5 Theatre Nurses.
- 4 Since October 2004, it has been a requirement to be registered with the Health Professions Council to work as an Operating Department Practitioner as this is a protected title by law.

Speech and Language Therapists: Recruitment

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department will consider lifting the vacancy control measures in relation to the recruitment of speech and language therapists.

(AQW 8331/11-15)

Mr Poots: Vacancy control measures are put in place by Trust management in relation to their service and financial plans. As such, the appropriate time for the removal of vacancy controls is a matter for employers, in discussion with the Health and Social Board and the Department.

Health Service: Vacancies

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of current vacancies for (i) consultants; (ii) registrars; (iii) senior house officers; and (iv) pre-registration house officers in each hospital, in each Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 8334/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information from the latest Health & Social Care vacancy survey is provided below.

Number of current vacancies for Consultants, Specialty Registrars, Foundation House Officer 2 and Foundation House Officer 1 by Hospital as at 30th September 2011

Trust	Hospital	Consultant		Specialty Registrar		Foundation House Officer 2	
		HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE
Belfast	Beechcroft (Forster Green)	1	1.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	Belfast City Hospital	8	7.8	2	1.5	0	0.0
	Windsor House (BCH)	1	1.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	Mater Hospital	2	2.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	Musgrave Park Hospital	1	1.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	Royal Victoria Hospital	20	19.5	3	3.0	0	0.0
	Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children	6	6.0	4	4.0	0	0.0
	School of Dentistry	3	2.5	0	0.0	1	1.0
	Non-Hospital Location	2	1.8	0	0.0	0	0.0
Northern	Antrim	6	6.0	8	7.5	0	0.0
	Causeway	0	0.0	8	8.0	0	0.0
	Holywell	0	0.0	1	1.0	0	0.0

Trust	Hospital	Consultant		Specialty Registrar		Foundation House Officer 2	
		HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE
South Eastern	Downe	1	1.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	Lagan Valley	1	0.6	0	0.0	0	0.0
	Ulster	10	10.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Southern	Craigavon Area	12	12.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	Daisy Hill	7	6.9	0	0.0	0	0.0
Western	Altnagelvin	10	10.0	5	5.0	1	1.0
	Erne	3	3.0	2	2.0	1	1.0
	Gransha	1	1.0	0	0.0	0	0.0

Source: NI Health and Social Care Trusts

Notes:

1. HC = Headcount; WTE = Whole-time Equivalent.
2. Information on the number of vacancies within the Northern Ireland Health & Social Care is collected bi-annually (as at 31st March and 30th September) by means of a survey and is published on the DHSSPS website at http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/work_force/stats-hsc.htm .
3. A current vacancy is a post which at 30th September 2011, the organisation was actively trying to fill.
4. There were no vacancies for Foundation House Officer 1 at 30th September 2011.
5. Figures exclude vacancies for temporary posts.
6. Under Modernising Medical Careers, grading within the Medical and Dental Occupational Family was replaced by a new system. Information has therefore been provided within the new grading system framework.

Health Promotion

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how his Department intends to encourage people to choose a healthier lifestyle.

(AQW 8346/11-15)

Mr Poots: We are continuing to develop, review and revise our health promotion policies (on obesity, mental health, alcohol and drug misuse, tobacco, suicide, sexual health, etc) which include a particular focus on encouraging people to choose a healthier lifestyle.

The Public Health Agency will also continue to play a key role to encourage people to choose a healthier lifestyle by working with the statutory, community and other sectors in driving forward the implementation of these health promotion policies at both a regional and local level and in areas of greatest need.

In addition my Department is developing a new Public Health Strategic Framework which will follow on from Investing for Health and will seek renewed cross-Departmental and cross-sectoral support to tackle the wider social determinants of health.

Neurologists: Waiting Times

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the average waiting time to see a neurologist, following a referral from a G.P

(AQW 8403/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department collects information on the number of patients waiting for a first outpatient appointment for all referral sources, not just those received from a G.P.

Data are collected in aggregate time bands, based on the length of time a patient is waiting for a first outpatient appointment, therefore it is not possible to calculate an average waiting time. It is, however, possible to calculate the median time band, a similar statistical measure.

The waiting time for a first appointment with a consultant in the Neurology specialty, at 31st December 2011, the most recent quarter for which official statistics are available, is outlined in the table below.

PATIENTS WAITING FOR AN APPOINTMENT AT THE NEUROLOGY SPECIALTY, BY WEEKS WAITING

	0-6	>6-9	>9-13	>13-21	>21-26	>26	Total Waiting
Northern Ireland	1,347	617	680	1,028	537	1,683	5,892

Source: Departmental Return CH3

The median waiting time band, for a first outpatient appointment with a consultant in the Neurology specialty, at 31st December 2011, was between 13 and 21 weeks.

Complementary and Alternate Medicines Pilot Project

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 7481/11-15, why, if the Complementary and Alternate Medicines (CAM) pilot project was 'not designed to investigate the effectiveness of CAM therapies', did the final report evaluation of a CAM pilot project in Northern Ireland (2008) state that a pilot objective was 'to measure the health outcomes of the service and monitor health'.

(AQW 8408/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Complementary and Alternate Medicines (CAM) Pilot Project funded by the Department in 2007/2008 aimed to treat patients with acute or chronic conditions who were referred by their GP to a range of CAM therapies including acupuncture, chiropractic, osteopathy, homeopathy, reflexology, aromatherapy and massage. The project was commissioned with a view to exploring the potential to integrate CAM within existing primary care services in Northern Ireland.

The project evaluation relied significantly upon a validated patient-generated instrument which was used as a research tool to capture the patient's self-reported health change. The evaluation pointed to the need for a more scientific basis to examine the relationship between CAM and health outcomes for patients. No longitudinal studies were undertaken to ascertain whether the reported gains experienced by the patients were sustained. That would have required a quite different approach and structure to the project and its evaluation.

Cancer: Patient Information

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what data the Health and Social Care Trusts are required to collect on cancer patients aged (a) under 16; and (b) between 16 and 24; and (ii) whether data could be collected for cancer patients aged between 16 and 24, separate from the general adult patient data; and whether he will direct the Trusts to do so.

(AQW 8417/11-15)

Mr Poots: Health and Social Care Trusts collect information relating to cancer patients of all ages including, but not specifically relating to, patients aged under 16 and patients aged between 16 and 24. Trusts are not required to collect this data for statistical purposes.

Health and Social Care Trusts use a range of systems to collect this information for care pathway management purposes, for example;

- New cancer referrals for patients of all ages is recorded on the Northern Ireland Regional Cancer Patient Pathways system (CaPPs). Information recorded on CaPPs includes date of referral, date of diagnosis, date of decision to treat, date first seen and first treatment type.
- Information for all patients including cancer patients of all ages is also routinely recorded on the Patient Administration System (PAS) including the number of referrals to an outpatient service with suspect cancer and details on diagnosis and treatment in an inpatient or day case setting.
- Systems exist specifically for recording information on patients receiving radiotherapy and chemotherapy treatment which include date of birth.

As date of birth is recorded on CaPPs and PAS, it is currently possible for Trusts to separate data for cancer patients aged 16-24 from the general adult patient data.

I have no plans to direct the Trusts to collect this specific information.

Cancer: Patient Support

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what provisions are in place to tailor support and meet the needs of cancer patients aged between 16 and 24 in comparison to children and general adult cases.

(AQW 8418/11-15)

Mr Poots: I must advise that the health service provides specialist Consultants, Clinical Nurse Specialists, Allied Health Professionals, Community Children's Nurses and hospice services tailored to meet the individual needs of a patient, regardless of age. This support extends to the family of the patient.

However I recognise that there is more than we can do with regard to services for young cancer patients aged between 16 and 24 in respect of raising awareness of the needs of this particular age group; developing of appropriate referral pathways and protocols; and strengthening multidisciplinary teams and mechanisms for shared care arrangements.

I can advise that the HSC Board and Public Health Agency aim to take forward work to ensure that pathways and protocols for teenagers and young adults with cancer reflect high quality care, consistent with NICE Guidance on Improving Outcomes for Children and Young People with cancer. It is intended that this work will be progressed in collaboration with HSC Trusts and voluntary sector organisations.

Postage and Printing Costs

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department, and its arm's-length bodies, give elected representatives the choice of receiving reports and all other correspondence by email to minimise postage and printing costs.

(AQW 8426/11-15)

Mr Poots: In line with good practice and sustainable development, my Department has implemented an electronic publications policy, where statutory or parliamentary constraints permit. Elected representatives are advised of the launch of Departmental public consultations via a letter of notification, giving them the opportunity to obtain copies of the documents in their preferred format.

Similarly my Department's Arms Length Bodies seek to make reports available electronically in the first instance, providing hard copies where there is a statutory requirement to do so, or on request.

When an elected representative corresponds with my Department, a hard copy response will routinely be provided unless an electronic response is requested. For correspondence to my Department's Arms Length Bodies, a response will generally issue in the same format as the initial contact was made, unless the response is requested in a particular format.

MRI Scanner: Paediatric Intensive Care Unit, Royal Victoria Hospital

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 7665/11-15, to detail (i) when in 2012 the outline business case will be submitted; (ii) how long approval is likely to take; (iii) how many children required an MRI scan in 2010; (iv) for a breakdown of the number of patients currently waiting for an MRI scan and how long they have been waiting; (v) how many children are currently waiting for an MRI scan; and (vi) the provisions currently in place for children who require an MRI scan.

(AQW 8481/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) Prior to the development of an outline business case for this project, the Belfast HSC Trust must obtain Departmental and HSCB approval for a Strategic Outline Case (SOC), which outlines the approximate costs in terms of revenue and capital, together with a range of options to address the need. Work is well advanced on the SOC which is expected to be submitted for approval in the next few weeks.
- (ii) The further development and approval of a more detailed Outline Business Case (OBC) might reasonably take 6 to 9 months. OBC approval is necessary before funding can be identified within the overall budgetary allocation and expenditure incurred.
- (iii) I have been informed by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust that a total of 1,012 children¹ received an MRI scan at the Trust during 2010.
- (iv) The number of patients currently waiting for an MRI scan at the Belfast HSC Trust, and the length of time they are currently waiting, is outlined in the table below:

NUMBER WAITING FOR AN MRI SCAN (BY WEEKS WAITING)

HSC Trust	0 - 6	6 - 9	9 - 13	13 - 21	21 - 26	Over 26	Total waiting
Belfast	987	154	306	222	67	347	2,083

Source: Belfast HSC Trust

- (v) Of the 2,083 patients currently waiting for an MRI scan at the Belfast HSC Trust, 332 are children¹.
- (vi) The Belfast HSC Trust has informed me that there are currently seven MRI scanners within the Trust. The majority of children receive their MRI scan within the Imaging Centre at the Royal Victoria Hospital. This is the only facility with a scanner equipped with the provision to administer general anaesthetic to those children who require it.

¹ Children are categorised as patients aged between 0 and 16 years of age.

Elderly Care

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his Department's assessment of the care currently provided to the elderly in (i) hospitals; (ii) independent and statutory nursing homes; and (iii) residential homes.

(AQW 8491/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) registers and inspects a wide range of health and social care services and facilities. This includes those caring for the elderly, such as nursing homes, residential care homes and domiciliary care agencies. The quality of services is assessed against minimum care standards and inspections are intended to ensure the safety, comfort and dignity of all those using services. Where necessary, RQIA can take enforcement action to drive improvements.

All treatments provided in hospitals in Northern Ireland are based on clinical need regardless of the patient's age.

Hospitals: Retail Outlets

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the procurement process in relation to the provision of (i) vending machines; and (ii) other retail outlets within hospitals, including the average length and value of a contract.

(AQW 8532/11-15)

Mr Poots: The question of procurement arises where Trusts act as purchasers. In the present context Trusts are more often in receipt of income from e.g. companies owning the vending machines than paying for goods or services. Where procurement does arise it is conducted under the guidance of the Business Services Organisation's Procurement and Logistics Service (BSO PaLS).

With that in mind, the answers are as follows:

- i contracts above £30k are advertised on the E-Sourcing NI web portal. For contracts below that threshold, BSO PaLS complies with the DHSSPS procedures on minor procurement expenditure e.g. a minimum of three written quotations are sought where the contract value exceeds £2k; and
- ii. the duration of contracts in relation to retail outlets varies; three years, with provision for one or more 12-month extensions, would not be untypical. Their cost structure may also differ; a contract may be framed to allow for annual payment, payment to cover the multi-annual duration of the contract, or payment based on the use made of the service.

Marian Price: Move to Hydebank Wood

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust advised that Marian Price should be moved from Maghaberry Prison.

(AQW 8534/11-15)

Mr Poots: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has responsibility for the healthcare needs of prisoners. In close partnership with the Northern Ireland Prison Service, the Trust has been regularly reviewing the health and well-being of Marian Price. Based on this ongoing clinical assessment, the Northern Ireland Prison Service decided to relocate Marian Price to Hydebank Wood.

Craigavon Area Hospital: Fertility Clinic

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether a Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority licensed consultant, who can carry out intra-uterine insemination treatment, is employed at the Fertility Unit at Craigavon Area Hospital.

(AQW 8550/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Southern Health and Social Care Trust has confirmed that, on 23 February 2012, it received written notification from the Human Fertilisation Embryology Authority that a consultant had been successful in his application to become the person responsible for the fertility clinic at Craigavon Area Hospital.

This will allow intrauterine insemination to take place at the fertility clinic with immediate effect.

Alcohol: Average Adult Consumption

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any research his Department has carried out on the average alcohol consumption of adults.

(AQW 8608/11-15)

Mr Poots: My department publishes a range of statistical information on alcohol consumption of adults in Northern Ireland which can be found in the reports listed below:

- 1 Adult drinking patterns in Northern Ireland - This report examines the amount of alcohol respondents consumed, when, where and what they drank, who they drank with, together with binge and problem drinking. The latest report is available at:
http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/adult_drinking_patterns_in_northern_ireland_2011.pdf

- 2 Health Survey Northern Ireland – Summary information on the percentage of respondents who reported drinking in excess of the weekly drinking limits can be found at:
http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/health_survey_northern_ireland_-_first_results_from_the_2010-11_survey.pdf
- 3 Social Costs of Alcohol Misuse in Northern Ireland for 2008/09 – This report examines the overall social costs of alcohol misuse in Northern Ireland, in light of healthcare, social work, public safety, criminal justice and economic costs. A copy of the report can be found at:
http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/social_costs_of_alcohol_misuse_200809.pdf

Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland: Funding

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on his Department's approach to funding community pharmacies.

(AQW 8615/11-15)

Mr Poots: The remedy hearing for the Judicial Review brought by Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland (CPNI) was held on 7 February 2012. At the hearing Mr Justice Treacy did not rule that the 2011 Drug Tariff does not provide fair and reasonable remuneration, nor that the Drug Tariff is illegal.

I am committed to the development of a long term, stable model for the delivery of community pharmacy services in Northern Ireland and met with CPNI on 14 February to agree a way forward for community pharmacy within the current constrained financial environment.

Following this meeting negotiations have resumed between my officials and CPNI with the aim of developing a long term stable model which will ensure the adequate provision of community pharmacy services to the public in Northern Ireland.

Mental Health Services: Omagh

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will give a commitment to retain and expand mental health services in the Omagh area.

(AQW 8634/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am committed to ensuring the people of Northern Ireland, including people in the Omagh area, have equitable access to mental health services. This service provision will be within the context of regional policy, particularly the Bamford Review and Transforming Your Care. Service provision will reflect regional policy by focussing on treating people in the community and reducing the need for inpatient care.

The future provision of inpatient mental health services in the Omagh area will be considered within Phase 2 proposals for the Omagh Hospital. These will be subject to consultation and set out in a business case for approval by the Health and Social care Board and my Department. At this stage Phase 2 is not scheduled to commence within this budget period.

Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland: Judicial Review

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much the judicial review in relation to the Pharmaceutical Contractors Committee cost his Department, including (a) the total legal costs incurred; and (b) the legal costs his Department had to pay to the Committee.

(AQW 8638/11-15)

Mr Poots: As previously stated in my answers to AQW 7825/11-15, AQW 7855/11-15 and AQW 7931/11-15; the Departmental Solicitor's Office acted on behalf of my Department and to date they have not submitted an account of the costs they incurred in defending the action. To date no account has been received from CPNI of the legal costs they incurred in taking the Judicial Review.

Community Meals

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline (i) the eligibility criteria for community meals; (ii) what consultation took place to ensure that it correctly identifies the nutritional and social needs of older and vulnerable people; and (iii) if any service users were consulted.

(AQW 8644/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Eligibility Criteria to Support and Maintain Service Users' Independence in Meal Preparation is designed to consider the various stages in assessing a service user's ability to prepare and eat meals. It is intended to prompt consideration of the needs and risks and to consider the range of options available to meet those needs and risks.

The eligibility criteria for community meals are not a nutritional assessment tool. Any client referred will have had their total care needs assessed using the Northern Ireland Single Assessment Tool which has a nutritional domain. If there are concerns regarding a client's nutritional status, a referral would be made to the District Nursing Service to complete a nutritional assessment using the Malnutrition Universal Screening Tool as recommended in the regional strategy "Promoting Good Nutrition".

The Guidance was adopted by all Trusts to ensure regional consistency in the approach to the provision of a Community Meals Service. I understand that there was no consultation with service users.

Blood: Received in Northern Ireland

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the countries in Great Britain that Northern Ireland received blood from in each month between January and October 2011.

(AQW 8645/11-15)

Mr Poots: Details of blood received in Northern Ireland from countries in Great Britain from January 2011 to October 2011 are as follows.

Month	Country	Detail
January 2011	Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service (SNBTS)	50 units
February 2011	-	-
March 2011	-	-
April 2011	-	-
May 2011	-	-
June 2011	-	-
July 2011	-	-
August 2011	Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service (SNBTS)	40 units
September 2011	-	-
October 2011	-	-

Dental Remuneration: Practice Allowance

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether an impact assessment has been carried out on the effect that the loss of 7 percent gross income will have on the ability of

Health Service dental practices' to provide treatment for patients in deprived areas, whilst remaining financially viable and being able to continue to employ staff during implementation of HTM 01-05.

(AQW 8675/11-15)

Mr Poots: Health Service committed dental practices remain able to claim the higher rate of practice allowance and so it was not considered necessary to carry out an impact assessment. The criteria for claiming Practice Allowance are clearly set out in the Statement of Dental Remuneration. If practices are unable to register 100 fee paying adults and are therefore, unable to meet the criteria set out in the Statement of Dental Remuneration, they may apply to the HSC Board to have this condition waived. If, on appeal, the practice submits a declaration which demonstrates that the practice is at least 90% committed to the Health Service then the higher rate of Practice Allowance will be paid. All changes to the Statement of Dental Remuneration are made following consultation with the British Dental Association. The requirement to submit this declaration in order to receive the practice allowance was implemented from the 1 April 2011.

If practices do not meet the criteria in the Statement of Dental Remuneration and are unable to claim the higher rate of practice allowance this is because they have a significant income from private treatments. It is, therefore, not unreasonable for some of this income to be used to help fund practice expenses.

Dental Remuneration: Practice Allowance

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how dentists, working in the top 20 percent most deprived areas, were informed that the automatic 7 percent Practice Allowance would be cancelled.

(AQW 8676/11-15)

Mr Poots: The changes to the criteria for determining eligibility for the Practice Allowance were made following consultation with the British Dental Association and were fully implemented with effect from 1 April 2011. The wider profession were informed of the changes through two Memoranda to Dentists (MDS). These were issued to all General Dental Practitioners by the Business Services Organisation in April 2009 and January 2011.

Accident and Emergency: Average Waiting Times

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average waiting time at an Accident and Emergency Unit in each Health and Social Care Trust area, in the last 12 months.

(AQW 8678/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on the average waiting time at Accident & Emergency Units in each Health & Social Care Trust area in the last 12 months is not currently available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Information on emergency care waiting times is published quarterly and is available to view or download from: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/hospital-stats/emergency_care-3/emergency_care-monthly_waiting_times.htm

The latest published information on emergency care waiting times refers to the months of October, November and December 2011.

MRI Scanner: Clark Clinic, Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether any funding has been allocated for a dedicated MRI scanner at the Clark Clinic at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children, given that Northern Ireland is still the only area in the UK which does not have a dedicated MRI scanner for children.

(AQW 8689/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am supportive of this scheme, but I am not in a position to allocate funding to this, or any other project, until a business case has been assessed and approved confirming the need for and

value for money of the proposal. The Belfast Trust is currently developing the required analysis and a detailed Outline Business Case (OBC) is expected to be submitted later in 2012, for consideration and approval. Following approval, I will then be in a position to try to identify the required funding from within my constrained budgetary allocation.

Northern Ireland Cancer Network: Workplan

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the 2012 work plan for the Northern Ireland Cancer Network has been agreed.

(AQW 8690/11-15)

Mr Poots: The role of NICAN is to contribute to improved cancer care by promoting and implementing patient pathways and protocols, developed through a multi disciplinary and patient centred approach. The 2012/13 work plan for NICAN will be developed in the context of agreed priorities for cancer care.

NICAN will work closely with the HSC Board and Agency's commissioning teams to translate the priorities into specific action to help prevent cancer, promote early diagnosis, and improve patient care and experience through the HSC sector.

It is anticipated that the 2012/13 work plan for NICaN will be finalised in April 2012.

Cancer: Care and Treatment of Children and Young People

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how he intends to improve the care and treatment of children and young people, up to the age of 24 years, with cancer.

(AQW 8691/11-15)

Mr Poots: I recognise that there is more than we can do with regard to services for young cancer patients aged between 16 and 24 in respect of raising awareness of the needs of this particular age group; developing of appropriate referral pathways and protocols; and strengthening multidisciplinary teams and mechanisms for shared care arrangements.

I can advise that the HSC Board and Public Health Agency aim to take forward work to ensure that pathways and protocols for teenagers and young adults with cancer reflect high quality care, consistent with NICE Guidance on Improving Outcomes for Children and Young People with cancer. It is intended that this work will be progressed in collaboration with HSC Trusts and voluntary sector organisations.

Bipolar Disorder: Number Being Treated

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are currently being treated for bi-polar disorder, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 8696/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on the number of people currently being treated for bi-polar disorder is not available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Bipolar Disorder: Diagnosis

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail how bi-polar disorder is diagnosed.

(AQW 8697/11-15)

Mr Poots: When Primary care clinicians suspect a diagnosis of Bipolar Disorder, individuals should be referred to specialist mental health services for comprehensive assessment, including consideration of their history of physical and psychological symptoms, behaviour, and social functioning. A diagnosis of Bipolar Disorder would be made if the assessment confirmed the necessary criteria for this disorder, as drawn from recognised classifications of mental disorders such as the WHO Classification of Mental and Behavioural Disorders.

Bipolar Disorder: Treatment and Support

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures are in place to ensure that patients with bi-polar disorder are given the appropriate treatment and support.

(AQW 8698/11-15)

Mr Poots: As with other mental health disorders, following confirmation of the diagnosis of Bi-polar Disorder by specialist services, a care plan will be developed appropriate to the person's assessed needs and which may include physical treatments such medication, psychological therapies, and social supports. Treatment of the person often involves care being provided across a range of settings, from primary care, community mental health services, outpatient care, day therapy through to inpatient care. Individuals may also require social support depending on their circumstances and this may include support from appropriate voluntary sector organisations, help with housing, education or employment.

Around £235m is spent annually on specialist services for people with mental health problems (although it is not possible to identify separately the amount spent by Health and Social Care Services on the treatment and support of people with individual disorders such as Bi-polar Disorder). This does not include expenditure on primary care services.

Voluntary organisations which may treat and support patients with Bi-polar Disorder are an important part of the range of support available. Such organisations have an obligation to follow appropriate professional and good practice guidance, and also to monitor their performance through their own governance arrangements. The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority has a responsibility to regulate and monitor the provision of specific services to people with mental health problems, following their assumption of the responsibilities of the Mental Health Commission.

Prostate Cancer: Abiraterone

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has any plans to approve and fund the use of Abiraterone for the treatment of prostate cancer.

(AQW 8709/11-15)

Mr Poots: Abiraterone is a newly licensed drug in the UK since September 2011. NICE published a draft technology appraisal on 1st February 2012 which does not recommend the use of abiraterone. This guidance has now been issued for consultation. In addition the manufacturer has requested permission to submit further analyses to address some of the Appraisal Committee's considerations which will necessitate re-scheduling of the planned second Committee meeting to facilitate a further evidence review. It is possible that NICE's recommendation may change following consultation. NICE is now due to publish the final guidance in June 2012.

In Northern Ireland patients can access drugs that are not approved by NICE through the Individual Funding Request (IFR) process if their consultant considers the drug to be of benefit to them. All cases are dealt with on an individual basis and considered on its merits, however it is expected that clinical exceptionality is demonstrated to support an IFR request.

Prostate Cancer: Spend on Treatment

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much has been spent on the treatment of prostate cancer in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8711/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information is available on the cost of inpatient episodes and day case attendances in an acute hospital setting only where the patient has a diagnosis of prostate cancer.

Financial Year	No. Day cases	No. Inpatient FCEs	Total Cost £m
2010-11	1,289	2,027	5.5
2009-10	1,376	2,044	5.7

Financial Year	No. Day cases	No. Inpatient FCEs	Total Cost £m
2008-09	1,210	1,622	4.5
2007-08	999	1,479	3.8
2006-07	867	565	1.8

Information is collected for Trust local administrative purposes, but not at the level of detail required to determine what has been spent on people with specific diagnoses such as prostate cancer. Similarly, information on the costs of A&E, outpatient, primary care, community and personal social services, chemotherapy drugs and delivery (day cases), would only be available at disproportionate cost.

Business Services Organisation: Staffing Issues

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the commencement of the Business Services Organisation recruitment process for administration staff, in particular its impact on the validity of the consultation on the Business Services Transformation Programme and on staff who are currently in administrative jobs which are not considered safe.

(AQW 8763/11-15)

Mr Poots: This recruitment exercise concerned the requirements of the current Business Services Organisation (BSO). It was aimed at developing a waiting list of applicants to fill BSO vacancies that may arise over the course of the year and which, for business continuity reasons, need to be filled on a temporary basis. It was entirely unrelated to the Business Services Transformation Programme in general and to the Shared Services proposals in particular - a point demonstrated by the fact that the locations named in the recruitment pack were those of existing BSO operations, and did not include Omagh, one of the proposed sites for a Shared Service Centre of Expertise.

Given the uncertainty provoked by its publication, however, the BSO has reviewed the timing of its current recruitment exercise and has decided to suspend it until we are clearer as to the impact on staff of the Shared Services decisions.

Antrim Area Hospital

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the next phase of the Antrim Area Hospital will be completed.

(AQW 8811/11-15)

Mr Poots: The next phase of development at Antrim Area Hospital will contain a new Emergency Department and a new 24 bedded unit. The 24 bedded unit is expected to be completed in January 2013 and operational in February 2013 while the new Emergency Department is expected to be completed in April 2013 with an anticipated opening date of June 2013.

Business Services Organisation: Correspondence Requests

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many requests his Department has received for copies of all correspondence between the Business Services Organisation and his Department in relation to the Business Services Transformation Programme; and (ii) how many of the requests did his Department fulfil.

(AQW 8837/11-15)

Mr Poots: One request was received by the Business Services Organisation under Freedom of Information provisions and this was denied on the basis of "policy under development". Subsequently, an appeal against this decision was received and is, as yet, under consideration by the Business Services Organisation.

Job Losses: South Down

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many jobs have been lost in each of the last 10 years, in the South Down constituency, broken down by (i) council ward; (ii) departmental jobs; and (iii) jobs in his Department's arm's-length bodies.

(AQW 8906/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) Details of job losses in the HSC by council ward are not available;
- (ii) None of my Department's civil servants are employed in the South Down Constituency.
- (iii) Job losses in the health economy in the last four years have been a direct result of the RPA reforms. Under these reforms 1,700 administrative posts were removed from the health economy across Northern Ireland. The RPA reforms were designed primarily to ensure that administrative structures and procedures are fit for purpose and that resources are maximised for frontline services. Developments in frontline services are dependent upon the reinvestment of £49 million RPA savings. It is not possible to break these jobs down by constituencies.

Nursing Cover: Belmont House Special School, Derry

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what arrangements his Department has put in place for emergency school nurse cover for Belmont House Special School, Derry.

(AQW 8960/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am advised by the Western Health and Social Care Trust that there is no requirement to have nursing cover at Belmont House Special School. However, the Trust has suggested that the question may relate to Foyle View Special School, Londonderry, which is also located on the Racecourse Road, Londonderry.

The Trust advises that it does provide a school nurse to Foyle View School and attempts to cover any absences. However, this is not always possible due to a shortage of available workforce. The Trust continues to seek to recruit into a range of temporary cover arrangements.

The Trust further advises that classroom assistants at Foyle View School have been appropriately trained and possess the skills required to meet the needs of every child attending the School.

Family Fund: Funding Allocation

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much funding has been allocated to the Family Fund in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8997/11-15)

Mr Poots: The funding allocated by my Department to the Family Fund in the last three financial years was as follows:

2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
£1.73m	£1.77m	£1.57m

Family Fund: Applications

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when applications to the Family Fund can be submitted.

(AQW 8998/11-15)

Mr Poots: Applications to the Family Fund can be submitted at any time.

Department of Justice

Kanram Jafar: Release from HMP Maghaberry

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how Kanram Jafar was erroneously released from HMP Maghaberry; and whether he has been returned to custody.

(AQW 8271/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I can confirm that Kamran Jafar was released from Maghaberry Prison on 8 February 2012 before service of a warrant by the UK Border Agency giving Northern Ireland Prison Service the authority to hold him pending removal or deportation. The circumstances surrounding the release are subject to a full investigation by the Northern Ireland Prison Service. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the circumstances while the investigation is ongoing. Mr Jafar has not been returned to custody.

Legal Aid: 12 July 2011 Public Order Offences

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, of the 30 men who are due to stand trial for public order offences committed over the Twelfth of July 2011 period in Belfast, (i) how many have been granted legal aid; (ii) how many legal companies are on record; (iii) how many have been certified for counsel; (iv) what is the cost of legal aid to date; and (v) what is the projected overall legal aid cost.

(AQW 8274/11-15)

Mr Ford: Court records show that 31 defendants, who are charged with offences arising from public order offences committed over the Twelfth of July 2011 period in Belfast, have still to be dealt with. Of those, 30 are legally aided.

There are a total of 24 firms of solicitors on record as representing the 30 legally aided defendants. To date only two of the defendants have had their cases certified for counsel.

The total paid to date in respect of representation at the Magistrates' Court is £3,356.00 (inc. VAT of £491.00). The total paid to date in respect of PACE (the Police and Criminal Evidence Act) advice is £4,321.70 (inc. VAT of £705.97).

It is estimated that the overall cost of advice under PACE and the Magistrates' Court proceedings will be approximately £33,000.

As this case is still ongoing not all bills have yet been received.

Policing and Community Safety Partnerships: Independent Members

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Justice whether the deadline for the quota of applications for independent members of the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships was met by all councils; and whether he can confirm that all the applications received before the deadline will be considered, and that applications received after the deadline will not.

(AQW 8342/11-15)

Mr Ford: The process of recruiting independent members to the new Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) is not carried out by my Department, but is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

Prisons: Ministerial Visits

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether he intends to visit any of Her Majesty's prisons in other regions of the UK which are bound by the same searching laws as Northern Ireland, given that he intends to visit Portlaoise Prison, which is outside British jurisdiction.

(AQW 8360/11-15)

Mr Ford: In addition to a recent visit to Portlaoise Prison, I have previously visited Birmingham Prison and Edinburgh Prison.

I will visit prisons in any jurisdiction where such visits are beneficial and relevant to my role as Minister of Justice.

Safer Custody Project

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice on what dates did the Safer Custody Project commence and finish; and what changes or amendments have been made in prisons as a result.

(AQW 8432/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Safer Custody Project was initiated by Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) in November 2009 in response to the findings and recommendations made by the Prisoner Ombudsman in her report into the tragic death of Colin Bell in 2008. In October 2010, this project was subsequently subsumed into the Vulnerable Prisoners Programme, which provides a continuous improvement approach to the development of the safer custody function. Work within the vulnerable prisoners programme will also link in with the Strategic Efficiency and Effectiveness (SEE) programme in the coming months. The SEE programme is the vehicle which will deliver fundamental end to end change within NIPS and place all those in their care at the centre of what they do.

Noticeable changes to prison regime and delivery of services to those considered vulnerable thus far are considerable and include:

- Development of formal working arrangements between NIPS and the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust in the care and treatment of vulnerable prisoners and those who are identified as poor copers and potentially at risk;
- Introduction of the Supporting Prisoners At Risk (SPAR) procedures, providing a multi-disciplinary approach to the management of those who self harm or show signs of potential suicide. This process has replaced the dated PAR1 process which was criticised in previous reports;
- Improved links and working arrangements between NIPS and the Samaritans organisation; the Samaritans provide training and mentoring for the peer support programme known as the Listener scheme;
- Opening of the Therapeutic Day Centre – Donard – at Maghaberry to provide a day centre facility for chronic cases offering vulnerability assessments and provision of support managed through delivery of a structured and predictable regime, staffed by Healthcare professionals and specifically trained prison staff;
- Completion of the Challenging Anti-social Behaviour policy and procedures which will effectively manage all aspects of anti-social behaviour; and
- Delivery of training to prison staff of Supporting Prisoners at Risk procedures and the Applied Suicide Intervention & Skills Training (ASIST).

Courthouses: Antisocial Behaviour

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether he will introduce legislation to make anti-social behaviour in the public gallery of court rooms a public offence.

(AQW 8433/11-15)

Mr Ford: A person in the public gallery of a court who engages in anti-social behaviour can already be prosecuted for the common law offence of contempt of court. Under the Contempt of Court Act 1981, a penalty of up to two years imprisonment or an unlimited fine can be imposed. The person can also be removed from the court by the court security staff with or without prosecution. I do not believe there is a need for an explicit anti-social behaviour offence in courts.

Trevor Bailie: Legal Aid Costs

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice what were the total legal aid costs in the failed Crown Court prosecution of Trevor Bailie by the Health and Safety Executive which concluded in or about September 2011.

(AQW 8445/11-15)

Mr Ford: The total paid to date in respect of Mr Bailie's defence at the Crown Court is £49,664.81 (including VAT of £4,791.88). Not all claims for payment have been received as yet.

HMP Maghaberry: Proposed Bowling Green

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the proposed bowling green at HMP Maghaberry, whether any work or assessments were carried out on the area of land in question by outside contractors, prior to the plan being abandoned.

(AQW 8495/11-15)

Mr Ford: Prior to plans being abandoned for a proposed bowling green at Maghaberry, no assessments were carried out by outside contractors.

Marian Price: Security at Hydebank Wood

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Justice to outline the security in place at Hydebank Wood Prison for Marian Price.

(AQW 8497/11-15)

Mr Ford: The security measures in place for any prisoner are based on security categorisation and risk assessment and are an operational matter. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the detail of such measures.

Policing and Community Safety Partnerships: Independent Members

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how many places are available for independent members on each of the proposed Police and Community Safety Partnerships.

(AQW 8592/11-15)

Mr Ford: The number of places available for independent members on each of the new Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) is dependent on the number of political members selected by each District Council. The Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 states that there will be 8, 9 or 10 political members on a PCSP, with 7, 8 or 9 independent members respectively.

The breakdown of places for independent members by PCSP is detailed below.

PCSP/ DPCSP	Independent members
Antrim	9
Ards	9
Armagh	9
Ballymena	9
Ballymoney	9
Banbridge	8
Belfast	9
Belfast - North	5
Belfast - South	5

PCSP/ DPCSP	Independent members
Belfast - East	5
Belfast - West	5
Carrickfergus	7
Castlereagh	8
Coleraine	9
Cookstown	7
Craigavon	9
Derry	9
Down	9
Dungannon & South Tyrone	8
Fermanagh	9
Larne	7
Limavady	8
Lisburn	9
Magherafelt	8
Moyle	7
Newry and Mourne	9
Newtownabbey	9
North Down	9
Omagh	7
Strabane	7
Total	237

Child Abduction: Convictions

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of convictions for child abduction in each of the last five years; and in how many cases the convicted person was related to the child.

(AQW 8727/11-15)

Mr Ford: Abduction of a child is an offence under Articles 3 and 4 of the Child Abduction (Northern Ireland) Order 1985. It is also an offence to abduct a child from care under the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.

The table below gives the number of persons convicted for child abduction offences between 2004 and 2008 (the latest year for which data are available).

Offence	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Child Abduction (By Parent etc)	No convictions				
Attempted Child Abduction (By Parent etc)	No convictions				
Child Abduction (By Other Person)		1	1	1	

Offence	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Attempted Child Abduction (By Other Person)	1		1		1

In the case of the convictions above, it is not possible accurately to determine from the database the relationship of the person convicted to the child.

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

Data for 2004-2006 should not be directly compared with data from 2007 to 2008 as the data sets are sourced from different systems.

Case Number 12/20314

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 8564/11-15, given that the reporting restrictions imposed by the Court relate only to the identification of the defendant and the alleged victim, whether he can clarify if the defendant was on day release when the alleged offence was committed. **(AQW 8847/11-15)**

Mr Ford: As the reporting restrictions imposed by the Court in the above matter remain in force and have not changed since my earlier response, I refer you to my answer to AQW 8564/11-15 which was provided on 24 February 2012.

Department for Regional Development

A28 Killylea Road, Armagh: Street Lighting

Mr Irwin asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will erect street lighting on the main A28 Killylea Road, Armagh, to enhance the safety of pedestrians and motorists using the stretch of carriageway between the two junctions at Killylea village.

(AQW 7866/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): My Department's Roads Service has advised that it only installs road lighting, at a rural location, if it is required as a measure to reduce the incidence of after dark traffic accidents resulting in personal injury, and there are no alternative traffic options available which will produce a similar outcome.

I have asked my officials to meet with you on-site to discuss the Roads Service policy on street lighting. Mr Jack Robinson at Roads Service Southern Division, Marlborough House, Central Way, Craigavon, (028 3839 5627) will contact you to arrange a mutually convenient date.

Gritting Schedule

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the roads that have been added to the gritting schedule in each of the last five years; and (ii) how many vehicles, per day, were surveyed using each road at the time when it was added to the schedule.

(AQW 7945/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it carries out an assessment using a criteria based system which takes into account various factors including whether or not the road is a main through route, topography, road gradient and geometry, traffic volumes and availability of alternative routes. In addition, small settlements in rural areas, containing 100 dwellings or more, have salted links to roads on the main salted network.

A list of the roads added to the gritting schedule in each of the last five years and how many vehicles used the roads per day are detailed in the table below:-

Year	Road Name	Traffic Volume Vehicles per Day
2007/08	A2 Buncrana Road/Skeoge Roundabout, Londonderry	18,260
	Dundrum Road, Armagh	1,757
	Derrymore Road, Aghalee	1,396
	Brankinstown Road, Aghalee	900
	Leitrim Road, Leitrim	1,510
2008/09	U204 Urney Road, Clady	1,703
	U943 Whites Road, Ballygawley	1,581
	C437 Marble Arch Road, Florencecourt	1,529
	B146 Causeway Road, Bushmills	1,700
	B15 Whitepark Road, Bushmills	>2,000
	Tullyear Avenue, Banbridge	1,728
	Granemore Road, Keady	1,684
	Derrynoose Road, Derrynoose	1,670
	Derryleckagh Road, Warrenpoint	1,640
	Derryboye Road, Crossgar	1,693
2009/10	C407 Lack Road, Irvinestown	1,782
	C413 Makenny Road, Ballinamallard	1,504
	From B72 Strabane Road to Erganagh	Connection to settlement > 100 residences
	B64 Craigdunloof Road, Ballymena	1,138
	Tirkeeran Road, Garvagh, Coleraine	882
	Glen Road, Garvagh	769
	U248 Gortnaghey Road	540
	A26/M2 Dualling, Ballymena	23,420
	A515 Skeoge Road dualling, Londonderry	18,260
	Ballymagarry Lane / Lyndhurst Crescent, Belfast	2,200
	Station Road, Ballygowan	1,630
	Drumlough Road/Bavan Road, Mayobridge	2,207
Finnegans Road, Newry	2,191	

Year	Road Name	Traffic Volume Vehicles per Day
2010/11	A4 Dungannon to Ballygawley (new dual carriageway)	16,000-20,000
	U340 Tullybryan Road, Ballygawley	1,634
	A2 Clooney Road, Londonderry	27,740
	Old Kilmore Road, Moira	3,600
	Prince Andrew Way, Carrickfergus	6,628
	Clady/Cladymore Road, Armagh	1,308
	Blackskull Road, Donaghcloney	882
	New Line, Lurgan	1,868
2011/12	U6007 Bridge Street, Irvinestown	1,711
	C573 Springtown Road, Londonderry	3,801
	Cherry Road, Lisburn	5,762
	Lagmore View, Lisburn	2,066
	Mayfield Link, Glengormley	4,436
	Hill Street, Milford	1,453

Blue Badges: Enforcement

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has any plans to facilitate an awareness campaign to encourage abled-bodied drivers not to park in bays allocated for blue badge holders.

(AQW 8010/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has responsibility for parking enforcement in relation to disabled person's parking spaces on the public road and in Roads Service car-parks.

I can confirm that Roads Service gives a high priority to this enforcement to deter non Blue Badge holders from parking in these spaces. Roads Service has advised that from 1 January 2011 to 31 December 2011, 7,542 Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) were issued to vehicles parked in disabled person's parking spaces without clearly displaying a valid badge.

Officials in my Department avail of all possible opportunities to raise awareness of this issue and have contributed to numerous media interviews and newspaper articles. My staff will continue to do so through all forms of the media, as further opportunities arise.

I also feel that public awareness in this area will continue to develop as on-going effective enforcement is provided and PCNs are issued to contravening vehicles.

I would also advise that my Department has no responsibility for enforcement of disabled person's parking spaces on private land.

Duneany Road: Topography

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development whether Roads Service defines the Duneany Road, between Glarryford and Rasharkin, as having a difficult topography.

(AQW 8040/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that Duneany Road between Glarryford and Rasharkin has a good alignment and generally has only minor gradients along its 8 km length. Roads Service would therefore not consider Duneany Road as having a difficult topography.

Gritting Schedule: North Antrim

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development to list the roads in the North Antrim area which are used by no more than 1,500 vehicles per day and are currently on the gritting schedule.
(AQW 8041/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that traffic counts are not available for all roads in North Antrim that are on the salting schedule. Most of the salted routes have been on the schedule for many years and it is the Department's policy to dispose of winter service records after a period of seven years and traffic volume records after a period of five years.

Questions for Written Answer: Stationery Costs

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development how much his Department has spent on stationery costs in replying to Assembly Written Questions, including the price of the envelopes and paper used, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 8046/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department does not hold the information to provide the complete stationery costs in replying to Assembly Questions Written (AQWs).

Internal work on AQWs is mainly undertaken electronically via email. The table below provides the estimated paper and envelope costs, for the period 7 May 2007 to 31 January 2012 based on the work conducted within my Private Office, to answer AQWs which have been tabled for the Department for Regional Development including corrections.

Financial Year	Total number of AQWs answered	Estimated paper costs £	Estimated envelope costs £
7 May 2007 to 31 March 2008	877	25.24	52.30
1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009	1242	35.74	74.06
1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010	1158	41.09	69.11
1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011	1087	48.37	64.88
1 April 2011 to 31 January 2012	692	19.91	41.26
Total	5056	170.35	301.61

Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises: DRD Spend

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how much his Department has spent on conferences, away-days and team building exercises in each of the last three years.
(AQW 8097/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Expenditure on conferences, away-days and team building exercises by my Department for the last three financial years is laid out in the table below. The figures do not include the costs/fees for conferences organised by external bodies that my staff attended.

	Cost		
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Conferences	£0.00	£11852.00	£2518.00
Away-days	£15948.00	£14674.00	£2203.00
Team building exercises	£5248.00	£1024.00	£0.00

Trains: Gatwick Set

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) what is the current status of the Gatwick Set of trains; (ii) how much this set cost; and (iii) how long they were in service.

(AQW 8102/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has advised that:

- (i) and (iii) following its purchase in 2001 and subsequent commissioning, the Gatwick train set was used to supplement peak commuter capacity on the Cross Border Line, specifically between Newry and Portadown and to Belfast until June 2009. This rolling stock provides network back-up and remains an integral part of Translink's operational reserve fleet;
- (ii) the information requested relates to contracts Translink has entered into with other commercial organisations which are bound by confidentiality. Furthermore, the information has implications for the commercial interests of the organisation.

Trains: Gatwick Set

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) what was the cost of rebuilding a Driver Trailer for use with the Gatwick Set of trains; (ii) when this work was carried out; (iii) whether the Driver Trailer was used; (iv) where it is now; and (v) what are the future plans for this Driver Trailer.

(AQW 8109/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has provided the following detail:

- (i) The information requested relates to contracts Translink has entered into with other commercial organisations which are bound by confidentiality. Furthermore, the information has implications for the commercial interests of the organisation. The original business case for the Driver Van Trailer envisaged spare capacity for trains in place including for example security disruptions or other unforeseen events.
- (ii) In 2007, following the purchase of the Gatwick trains, Translink separately procured a Driving Van Trailer which was upgraded to the specification required to facilitate push-pull operation with the Gatwicks. This unit, along with modifications to three locomotives, has been fully tested and commissioned.
- (iii) Due to a downturn in the economy and a reduction in passenger numbers (particularly evident on the cross-border line) and revenues in Northern Ireland Railways during 2009, the Gatwick train set and upgraded Driving Van Trailer were not returned to service but were placed into reserve fleet.
- (iv) The Driving Van Trailer and Gatwick train set remain in strategic fleet reserve and are located at Lisburn and Ballymena sidings.
- (v) The Driving Van Trailer was part of an Economic Appraisal for short term

additional train capacity until the new trains arrived. This also included Class 80 refurbishment. The procurement of the new trains will allow Translink to retire a number of fleet.

Trains: Driving Brake Standard Open Carriage

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the status of the Driving Brake Standard Open carriage which Translink purchased from Rivera Trains; and how much did it cost.
(AQW 8113/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Driving Brake Standard Open carriage referred to above is the same vehicle referred to as a "Driving Van Trailer" in AQW 8109/11-15.

Parking: Priors Lea, Holywood

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to improve the parking facilities for residents at Priors Lea in Holywood, particularly for older residents.
(AQW 8160/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that there are no current plans to alter the existing parking facilities for residents at Priors Lea in Holywood.

Roads: Spend in Donaghadee

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how much has been spent on the roads in Donaghadee in each of the last five years.
(AQW 8161/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it has spent approximately £722,000 on roads in the Donaghadee area in the five financial years, from 2007/08 to date. Details of this spend are provided in the table below:

Year	Expenditure on roads in Donaghadee
2007/08	£108,000
2008/09	£80,000
2009/10	£275,000
2010/11	£52,000
2011/12	£205,000
Total	£720,000

Courthouse Closures: Impact on Transport Costs

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) whether he has had any discussions with the Minister of Justice regarding the provision of additional transport services, should the proposed courthouse closures go ahead; (ii) whether he is considering a dedicated court users service; and (iii) whether this would be a direct route to the courts or would it be absorbed into existing services.
(AQW 8168/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have not had such discussions with the Minister of Justice. I understand that issues related to access continue to be considered as part of the public consultation on the proposals. However, I have no powers to support a transport that is dedicated solely to court users.

A5: Capital Allocation

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Regional Development what proportion of his road construction budget will be allocated to the construction of the A5 upgrade during the period 2012/13 to 2015/16 inclusive.
(AQW 8223/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's capital budget allocation covers the period to 2014/15. In his recent announcement, the Minister of Finance and Personnel indicated that £20 million would be made available in 2015/16 to complete the currently proposed A5 works. The full capital allocation for that year will not be known until the next comprehensive spending review.

However, I can advise that the £310 million allocated for the A5 in the 2012/13 – 2014/15 period represents 47% of my capital budget for that period, at this point in time.

Parking: Private Car Park Fines

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of what level of fine or penalty, for a parking infringement in a private car park, is reasonable.

(AQW 8285/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has no authority or responsibility for the regulation of car parks on private land.

Therefore, I have no views on what level of fine or penalty for a parking infringement in a private car park is reasonable.

Parking: Private Car Park Regulation

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development, given the rising levels of clamping and penalties for parking infringements, for his assessment of the need to regulate private car park operators.

(AQW 8287/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has no authority or responsibility in relation to the regulation of car parks on private land.

I understand that the Department of Justice is looking at the future regulation of the private security industry in Northern Ireland, including issues arising from parking enforcement on private land.

A26 Dualling Scheme

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the A26 road, including the estimated timescale for progressing the required works.

(AQW 8288/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the A26 dualling scheme is currently progressing through the scheme assessment process. The Environmental Statement and draft Orders are programmed for publication in March 2012. The draft Orders include a draft Vesting Order which identifies the land required for the scheme, a draft Direction Order which is broadly equivalent to a planning application explaining the changes proposed to the trunk road network and a draft Stopping Up of Private Accesses Order.

If required, it is anticipated that a Public Inquiry would be held for this scheme in late 2012.

Timing of construction of the project is dependent on progression through the statutory processes and the availability of funding in the next Budget period and beyond. You will be aware that the draft Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2011-2021 is currently at the consultation stage.

Bus Stops: Digital Information Display Units

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the number of bus stops in the (a) East; (b) North; and (c) South Belfast constituencies; (ii) the number of these that have real-time digital information on display; and (iii) how many new real-time digital information display units are planned for (a) East; (b) North; and (c) South Belfast.

(AQW 8316/11-15)

Mr Kennedy:

- (i) The information is not available in exactly the format requested. Where Translink has details of bus stops in the greater Belfast area, they do not have the information as to where these are in relation to parliamentary constituency areas. The following table gives details of the number of bus stops (inbound and outbound) on each Metro corridor route across Belfast.

Service No.	Metro Corridor	No. of Stops Inbound	No. of Stops Outbound
1A	Antrim Road	62	61
2C	Shore Road	44	46
3A	Hollywood Road	36	30
4A	Upper Newtownards Road	49	38
5A	Castlereagh Road	34	33
6A	Cregagh Road	23	22
7A	Saintfield Road	35	33
8A	Malone Road	29	29
9A	Lisburn Road	34	32
10A	Falls Road	31	34
11A	Shankill Road	31	34
12A	Oldpark Road	24	28
	Total	432	420

- (ii) The information is not available in the format required as the maps available do not clearly define parliamentary boundaries. However the approximate numbers of bus stops in East, North and South Belfast constituencies that have real time digital information on display are provided in the table below:

Constituency	Bus Stops With Real Time Information
Belfast North	50
Belfast South	53
Belfast East	57

- (iii) With regard to the number of new passenger displays that are planned, I understand that the current contract is due to be re-tendered later this year and the provision of additional facilities will depend upon the level of funding that may be available.

A5: Business Case

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development when the Business Case for the two sections of the A5, which he announced on 14 February 2012 would proceed, was submitted to DFP; and when it was approved.

(AQW 8318/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As I previously advised the Member, the business case for all major road projects evolves as the scheme is developed. The economic assessment for the A5 is contained within the scheme development reports, which are available on the project's web site: <http://www.a5wtc.com/>.

The final business case will be compiled when the scheme has been defined following the public inquiry process and will be submitted to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) for approval prior to moving to the construction stage. This is in accordance with the process agreed with DFP.

A5: Upgrade

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 70/11-15, why he announced in advance of the Independent Inspector's report that two sections of the A5 will proceed. **(AQW 8319/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy: As the Member will be aware, my announcement of the upgrade of significant elements of the A5 to dual carriageway is part of a balanced package of improvements to our strategic road network. I have made it clear that progression of the A5, through completion of statutory procedures and commencement of construction, is subject to the outcome of the Public Inquiry held last year. This does not prejudge the outcome of the Inspector's report, nor compromise its independence.

This announcement is part of a collective decision taken by the Executive. The decision was necessary at this time in order to give Departments clarity on their budgets, as we approach a new financial year.

A5: Contractors

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development, in light of the statement by the Minister of Finance and Personnel in the Assembly on 14 February 2012, that contractors had already been appointed to build two sections of the A5 dual carriageway (i) who has been appointed; (ii) when they were appointed; and (iii) what is the contract price. **(AQW 8320/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that following completion of a 2 stage tender process in December 2009, contractors were appointed to the three sections of the proposed A5 dual carriageway project. Through this Early Contractor Involvement (ECI) type agreement, contractors were initially appointed to provide advice on construction related issues during the design stage and the Public Inquiry process. However, the construction phase of the contracts will not commence until completion of the statutory orders process, approval of the business case and conclusion of necessary administrative/legal procedures. Accordingly, there is no contract price in an ECI type contract as scheme specific target costs are agreed in advance of construction.

The contractors appointed to the two sections are as follows:

- New Buildings to Strabane – Balfour Beatty / BAM / FP McCann
- Omagh to Ballygawley – Graham / Farrans

A5: Funding Breakdown

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development for a breakdown of the £330m commitment announced in the Assembly on 14 February 2012 for the A5 project. **(AQW 8321/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy: Of the £330 million to be allocated to my Department for the A5 Dual Carriageway, it is estimated that £170 million will be required for the section from Londonderry to the North of Strabane and £160 million will be required for the section from south of Omagh to Ballygawley.

Unadopted Roads: County Fermanagh

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development what progress has been made in addressing the number of non-adopted roads in Co. Fermanagh. **(AQW 8373/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy: The Member will be aware that the adoption of road and sewerage infrastructure within private developments has become a significant issue in the current economic climate, as a result of the difficulties being faced by developers. In the Fermanagh District Council Area, as in all district council areas, my Department's Roads Service will continue to administer the adoption of private streets with due regard to available resource and the particular circumstances associated with each development.

Over the last few years, Roads Service's Western Division has, on average, adopted approximately 10% of the total "live" unadopted sites within any one year. This figure fluctuates given the nature of the work and the number of new sites moving into construction phase.

Roads Service remains committed to reducing the number of outstanding unadopted developments and the staff resource tasked with this function will remain in place. Roads Service practice is to afford defaulting developers every opportunity to comply with their undertakings, provided through private streets determinations, to complete the outstanding works. However, where the bond in place is insufficient to cover the cost of completing such works, Roads Service is only able to complete work if sufficient public funding is available.

Roads Service will continue to work with other Government Agencies, such as NI Water, to administer the backlog of development sites that require adoption, but it must be emphasised that responsibility for these sites remains with the developers until the adoption process can be completed.

Belfast to Londonderry Railway Line

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development, given that passenger numbers on the Belfast to Londonderry railway line compare favourably with those for the Belfast to Dublin line, whether he will seek to have this line 'pre-identified' on the EU Common European Framework list, so that the line may be considered for investment to accompany the present Trans European Network on the Belfast - Dublin - Cork line.

(AQW 8385/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Assuming that the member is referring to the Connecting Europe Facility, may I refer you to the answer given to Mr C Eastwood in response to AQW 8031/11-15.

Public Transport: Usage

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development how many people have used public transport in each of the last five years; and how many of these people are regular commuters.

(AQW 8389/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The number of passenger journeys on public transport services provided by Translink in each of the last 5 years is set out below.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT PASSENGER JOURNEYS (MILLIONS)

Year	Metro Millions	Ulsterbus Millions	NI Railways Millions	Total Millions
2006/07	24.1	43.4	8.5	76.0
2007/08	26.0	43.9	9.5	79.4
2008/09	26.5	44.0	10.2	80.7
2009/10	26.3	41.9	10.0	78.2
2010/11	25.8	40.8	10.4	77.0

Statistics on the actual numbers of passengers are not available.

Estimates of commuting journeys as a proportion of all Metro, Ulsterbus and NI Railways journeys have been obtained from the latest Travel Survey for Northern Ireland data (2008-2010). Applying these proportions to the actual numbers of passenger journeys for Metro, Ulsterbus and NI Railways in 2010/11 gives an estimated number of 15 million commuting journeys.

Making a very broad assumption that a commuter makes an average of 450 commuting journeys per year (45 working weeks times 10 journeys per week), this could mean that there were approximately 33,000 passengers in 2010/11 who might be regular commuters (15 million commuting journeys divided by 450).

A6: Derry to Dungiven Project

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 6499/11-15, in light of recent funding announcements for the A5 and the A8, when the dualling of the A6 from Derry to the M22 will be completed.

(AQW 8391/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that development work on the A6 Londonderry to Dungiven dual carriageway proposal is currently ongoing. As the Member may be aware, draft Statutory Orders were published in December 2011 and I would anticipate that a Public Inquiry will be held later this year.

I can also advise that the planning for dualling the A6 from Randalstown to Castledawson roundabout is complete with the exception of a junction at Castledawson. It is anticipated that planning for this proposed scheme will be complete in 2013, following the outcome of the Public Inquiry into the draft Vesting Order for the Annaghmore Road/Bellshill Road junction.

Timing of delivery of these projects will be dependent on the outcome of the Public Inquiries, the availability of funding, and successful procurement. Spending beyond the current budget period will be determined by the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2011-2021, which, as you may be aware, is currently published for consultation.

Public Transport: Promotion

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development what is his Department's strategy to encourage people to increase their use of public transport.

(AQW 8392/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS) presents a range of initiatives to improve our transportation infrastructure, promote sustainable travel and encourage the use of modes of travel other than the car. It is being implemented through three transport plans.

These plans provide for, and encourage, greater use of public transport and include proposals for improved bus and rail services, Park and Ride and Rapid Transit.

My Department for instance is providing funding to allow Translink to purchase a further 20 new trains, the first of which are already in service. It has also continued to fund the purchase of new modern buses which will be used throughout Northern Ireland.

My Department's Roads Service has advised that it continues to put measures in place that are intended to provide priority for buses and thereby help improve journey times and reliability. This includes measures such as bus lanes, bus priority at junctions, bus gates, and Quality Bus Corridors.

The provision of Park and Ride sites is recognised as having an important role in promoting sustainable transport which my Department will aim to prioritise as available funding permits. In addition, Roads Service is firmly committed to providing and improving bus based Park and Ride facilities and ensuring that the enforcement of parking restrictions continues to be a priority to assist bus and traffic flow.

Further, my Department's Travelwise Northern Ireland initiative is seeking to promote, and generally raise the awareness levels of the general public, towards more sustainable transport options including

cycling, walking, greater use of public transport in order to encourage a change in public attitudes away from the private car as the main mode of travel in Northern Ireland.

My Department is currently developing a bus-based rapid transit system for Belfast. The pilot Belfast Rapid Transit network will link East Belfast, West Belfast and Titanic Quarter with and through the city centre and present a further enhancement of public transport.

Public Transport: North Antrim

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to access to public transport serving the North Antrim constituency, to detail (i) the average distance from a residential property to the nearest bus stop; and the average frequency of services; and (ii) the average distance from a residential property to the nearest train station; and the average frequency of services.

(AQW 8393/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink have advised me that the information requested is not currently available and it would involve disproportionate cost for them to deliver relevant answers to the questions posed.

My staff in Transport Policy Division also advise that they do not keep the relevant information and the same issue of disproportionate cost applies within the Department. In the future arrangements to be put in place as a result of Public Transport Reform and relevant EU regulations may require this information to be formulated.

A5: Length of Dual Carriageway

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the length of each section of the A5 that is due to be upgraded as announced on 14 February 2012.

(AQW 8412/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: It is expected that the length of new offline dual carriageway between New Buildings and Strabane will be approximately 14km and approximately 21km between Omagh and Ballygawley. A 1.5km single carriageway bypass of New Buildings is also proposed. Final decisions on proposed works will depend on the outcome of the Public Inquiry process.

Rail Network: Expansion to Fermanagh and Tyrone

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the barriers, other than financial, to expanding the rail network to counties such as Fermanagh and Tyrone.

(AQW 8422/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Neither Northern Ireland Railways nor my Department has carried out studies to determine the extent of engineering works or land acquisition necessary to extend the rail network into Counties Fermanagh and Tyrone. There are no plans to carry out such studies. My current priority with regards to investment in railways remains to maintain, improve and upgrade the existing network.

Rail Network: North-west Staff Reductions

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development whether, in advance of intended staff reductions on the north-west rail stations, Translink has conducted a risk analysis to assess the enhanced security issues resulting from fewer staff on duty; and to outline the reasons for his position on this matter.

(AQW 8510/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In relation to staffing levels I would refer you to the answer to AQW 8511/11-15.

A risk analysis is an operational matter for Translink who have advised me that they have conducted and continue to review risk assessments relating to all stations network-wide. A live 'Change Management' process has been developed for Waterside and Coleraine stations. This process does consider risk analysis and is designed to ensure compliance with both internal and external

procedures/legislation. I will, of course, expect Translink to remain in contact with the PSNI about all relevant matters impacting on its operations.

Rail Network: Weekend Staff at Ballymena Railway Station

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development, in light of the proposed changes by Translink, what are the anticipated weekend staff levels at Ballymena Railway Station.

(AQW 8512/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Staffing levels are an operational matter for Translink who have advised me that the staffed opening hours of Ballymena Railway Station remain unchanged. The Station is staffed from 06:00 to 22:30 hours Monday to Saturday and is unstaffed on Sundays.

Cycle Targets: Active Travel Strategy

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development why the Draft Active Travel Strategy contains an aspiration to increase the percentage of cycle trips rather than a target.

(AQW 8514/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The draft Active Travel Strategy 'Building an Active Travel Future for Northern Ireland' aims to build upon the many programmes and initiatives that have already been successful – both in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. I want the Strategy, when agreed, to provide the foundations, over the longer term, to build a travel culture in which walking and cycling are seen as the natural choice for most of the journeys most of us make. Recognising that the proportion of trips made by bicycle in Great Britain is much higher than in Northern Ireland and that this is set to increase, I wanted the draft Strategy to capture the aspiration to rise to a comparable level over around ten years.

The public consultation on the draft Strategy ends on 9th March 2012. Following this and informed by the views expressed, we will consider whether a specific target is required. My Department will also draw up a detailed action plan to coordinate and monitor delivery and the impact of the actions through the current budget period, 2012 – 2015.

Cycle Targets: 2020

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development for his estimate of the percentage of cycle trips that should be made by 2020.

(AQW 8515/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The 'Travel Survey for Northern Ireland 2008 – 10' reveals that around 1% of all journeys undertaken in Northern Ireland are by bicycle and around 17% are walked. These figures compare to around 71% of all journeys taken by private car.

Increasing the number of journeys walked or cycled requires a reduction in the number of journeys taken by other modes – particularly the private car. A change in travel behaviour at the personal level is required if the walking and cycling percentages are to be increased and the number of journeys taken by car reduced.

Meeting the aspirational targets set out in the draft Active Travel Strategy (currently out to public consultation) should result in a doubling or tripling of the percentage of cycle trips made in Northern Ireland by 2020. This can be achieved if we all make a modest reduction in the number of journeys we take by the private car. The purpose of this Strategy, when agreed, is to build a travel culture in which walking and cycling are seen as the natural choice for most of the journeys most of us make.

Roads Network: Structural Maintenance

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the total level of funding allocated for structural maintenance of the roads network in the (a) 2012-2013; and (b) 2013-2014 financial years;

and (ii) whether he intends to allocate additional funding in the (a) 2012-2013; and (b) 2013-2014 financial years.

(AQW 8823/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: It is estimated that the current operational budget of my Department's Roads Service will provide an initial allocation for structural maintenance of £47.5 million during 2012/13 and £52 million during 2013/14.

The maintenance of road and footway surfaces and their underlying structure continues to be a high priority for Roads Service. However, there are many demands on the resources available and the road maintenance programme must therefore compete for funding along with the many other Departmental spending programmes.

Of course, it is always the case that additional maintenance work could be completed if more funding was made available. Roads Service will, therefore, continue to make strong bids for additional structural maintenance funds and, in the meantime, make the best use of available resources to develop and maintain the road network.

Department for Social Development

Housing Executive: Capital Spend

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has any plans to amend existing legislation to allow capital spending by the Housing Executive on multi-element improvements to its housing stock.

(AQW 8115/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The Housing Executive does not require any change in legislation to carry out improvement work to their own stock. However, their Multi-Element Improvement (MEI) Programme was suspended in 2007/08 initially due to a lack of funding brought about by the collapse of the land and property market. Since then however, Savills, a leading UK based residential consultant, have highlighted that such MEI works were inefficient and did not represent value for money for the public purse.

I remain committed to improving the homes of those 6,000 Housing Executive tenants who were previously on a MEI programme and one such alternative that is already being piloted is through Stock Transfer from Housing Executive to Housing Association ownership, such as the scheme in Rinmore, Londonderry. In this 55 homes have now transferred to a local Housing Association who is already undertaking the necessary improvement work from their own reserves and it is estimated this scheme alone will save the public purse up to £2.5m. However it was only approved after tenants voted overwhelmingly in favour of it and I am now exploring the potential for this in other areas where homes need significant improvement.

Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises: DSD Spend

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how much his Department has spent on conferences, away-days and team building exercises in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8188/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Details of expenditure on conferences, away-days and team building exercises in each of the last three years are provided in the table below:

2009-10	2010-11	2011-12 to date
77,618	68,490	31,328

Compensation Claims: Winter Weather

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the number; and (ii) the cost of outstanding compensation claims, in relation to the severe weather conditions in the winter of 2010/11, that his Department is currently assessing, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 8213/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive cannot provide the information in the format requested as they do not routinely collate information by Parliamentary constituency. However, the table below gives details of the outstanding claims relating to the severe winter weather conditions of 2010/11 by Housing Executive district office area.

District Office	O/S Claims	Amount Claimed*
Belfast East	2	£525
Belfast South	2	£1,500
Belfast North	2	£1,700
Belfast Shankill	16	£7,090
Newtownards	1	£1,600
Lisburn	3	£5,355
Downpatrick	2	£9,200
Newry	7	£17,105
Armagh	2	£430
Lurgan/Brownlow	1	£500
Dungannon	1	-
Fermanagh	4	£3,010
Ballymena	2	£2,000
Newtownabbey 1	1	-
Ballycastle	1	£1,060
Coleraine	1	£500
Waterloo Place	2	£2,400
Collon Terrace	2	£2,100
Limavady	6	£2,540
Strabane	4	£5,155
Total	62	£63,770

* The amounts claimed are those indicated by the claimant.

With regard to Housing Associations, there are two claims outstanding in relation to the severe weather conditions in the winter of 2010/11. Both are in the East Belfast constituency and total £10,832.

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Housing Executive: Annadale Flats Maintenance Repairs

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister for Social Development how much has been spent on repairs to the Annadale Flats, South Belfast, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8218/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has spent over £800,000 on improvements to the Annadale Flats over the last three years. This includes a kitchen replacement scheme that was carried out in 2011 at an estimated cost of £502,000 for 113 properties, and response maintenance repairs totalling £299,276.21 including over £23,000 on roof repairs. The table below gives a breakdown by year of the response maintenance repairs.

Year	All Repairs
01/01/09 – 31/12/09	£89,336.10
01/01/10 – 31/12/10	£128,126.29
01/01/11 – 31/12/11	£81,813.82
Total	£299,276.21

Housing Executive: Annadale Flats Roof Repairs

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister for Social Development how much has been spent on repairs to the roofs of the Annadale Flats, South Belfast, to make the them watertight.

(AQW 8219/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has spent £23,320.84 on repairs to the roofs of the Annadale Flats in the last three years. They are currently developing a programme for replacing the roofs of the flats commencing in the 2012/13 financial year, dependent on the availability of funding.

Housing Executive: Recruitment

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development for each of the last ten years, to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage of people recruited to the Housing Executive from a (i) Protestant; (ii) Roman Catholic; and (iii) non-determined religious background.

(AQW 8221/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below details the figures in relation to the religious composition of staff recruited to the Housing Executive in the last ten years.

Year	Total Recruited	Protestant		Roman Catholic		Non Determined	
		No	%	No	%	No	%
2002	398	153	38.4	213	53.5	32	8.0
2003	417	162	38.8	207	49.6	48	11.5
2004	320	117	36.6	168	52.5	35	10.9
2005	245	101	41.2	120	49.0	24	9.8
2006	243	82	33.7	138	56.8	23	9.5
2007	294	101	34.3	164	55.8	29	9.9
2008	127	52	40.9	51	40.2	24	18.9
2009	178	60	33.7	95	53.4	23	12.9
2010	98	47	48.0	40	40.8	11	11.2

Year	Total Recruited	Protestant		Roman Catholic		Non Determined	
		No	%	No	%	No	%
2011	114	57	50.0	37	32.5	20	17.5

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(Note: Percentage totals for each year may not add up to exactly 100% due to rounding's.)

Laganbank Quarter Development Scheme

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail his Department's involvement with the Laganbank Quarter development proposals.

(AQW 8252/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department has worked closely with Lisburn City Council over the past few years to prepare the supporting documentation required to progress the Laganbank Quarter Development Scheme. This work included an archaeology and heritage study, a flood risk analysis, the Lisburn City Centre masterplan and a detailed transport study. The next stage of the process is to prepare a Strategic Environmental Assessment of the proposed Development Scheme as required by legislation. My Department will appoint consultants to carry out the required assessment and should be in a position to publish a draft development scheme early next year.

Smithfield Square Development Proposals

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail his Department's involvement with the Smithfield Square development proposals.

(AQW 8253/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department worked closely with Lisburn City Council to develop a masterplan for the city centre, which was published in September 2010. The masterplan identified the Smithfield car park as a high priority development opportunity site. My Department appointed consultants in July 2010 to assist with the process of delivering the regeneration of this key site and, in conjunction with the Department for Regional Development, is currently in the process of finalising a development brief and initiating a procurement exercise to seek a 'preferred developer'. I anticipate that the competition will commence in early spring 2012 and I am hopeful that, subject to the response from the private sector, a preferred developer will be appointed by late summer 2012.

Dromore Revitalisation Scheme

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the Dromore Revitalisation Programme in the Lagan Valley area.

(AQW 8254/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department has been working with Banbridge District Council on a proposed revitalisation scheme for Dromore town centre. Banbridge District Council is currently engaging with local traders to draw up an action plan that will be submitted to my Department for consideration. The details of any scheme in Dromore will be determined by the contents of that action plan. When an agreed action plan is received, my Department will undertake an appraisal of the project.

Housing Executive: Applications for Assistance with Repairs and Extension Grants

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development how many of the 11,391 applications that the Housing Executive received for assistance with repairs and extension grants were successful in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8265/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The number of formal applications approved in the last three financial years were as follows:-

2008/09	6,087
2009/10	3,034
2010/11	3,103

It is important to note that following receipt of a formal application the Housing Executive must approve or refuse the application within six months. Therefore, the number of approvals issued each year will not relate directly to the number of formal applications received in that year.

Housing Executive: Spend on Vandalism in West Belfast

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development how much the Housing Executive has spent as a result of vandalism in the West Belfast area in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8266/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below details the total spent by the Housing Executive as a result of vandalism in West Belfast in each of the last three years.

Year	Cost
2008/09	£18,864.31
2009/10	£28,709.56
2010/11	£38,804.85

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Tenants: Antisocial Behaviour

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development, when a tenant with a history of anti-social behaviour moves into a new community, to detail the duty of care that the Housing Executive and Housing Associations have to (i) the community; and (ii) the new tenant with a history of anti-social behaviour.

(AQW 8267/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In relation to anti-social behaviour, neither the Housing Executive nor registered housing associations have any statutory duty of care to individual tenants or to the wider community. However, all social landlords in Northern Ireland recognise that every individual is entitled to live in peace within their neighbourhood, and are committed to tackling anti-social behaviour.

The Housing Executive has statutory power to treat applicants as ineligible for social housing if they have been guilty of unacceptable behaviour.

Since 2003, all new tenancies of social housing have been allocated on an introductory basis for 12 months. Where a new Housing Executive tenant appears to have a particular vulnerability, the Executive can arrange for support services to help the tenant to sustain their tenancy. In cases where

an introductory tenant proves to be unsuitable to hold a tenancy of social housing, landlords can repossess the tenancy with a minimum of delay during the 12 month period.

The Housing (Amendment) Act 2011 made new provision which allows the Housing Executive and housing associations to withhold consent to a tenancy exchange in cases where a court order relating to anti-social behaviour is in force. Similarly, policy guidance operated by the Housing Executive and housing associations currently stipulates that a tenant applying for a transfer should not be guilty of any serious breach of tenancy conditions, including unacceptable behaviour. I will be seeking to strengthen the guidance as part of the new Housing Strategy.

North West Quarter Masterplan

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development how he intends to address the dereliction of the North and West areas of Belfast City Centre, given the failings of the North West Quarter Masterplan.

(AQW 8273/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My department through the North West Quarter Part 1 (NWQ1) masterplan proposed a retail-led approach to the regeneration of the area focused on the redevelopment of Castlecourt. The developer selection process that we carried out in 2005/06 resulted in the selection of the Royal Exchange retail-led scheme, located in the North East Quarter of the city centre, as the next major scheme to follow Victoria Square ahead of Castlecourt. Given the ongoing downturn in the retail market it is doubtful whether the NWQ1 masterplan will be implemented in the foreseeable future. In view of this my department will give further consideration to the regeneration needs of the NWQ1 area. In the meantime the NWQ1 masterplan continues to be my department's adopted policy for the area.

Housing: Harbour Ward, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how much funding has been allocated to improve housing in the Harbour area of Bangor.

(AQW 8280/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are no Housing Executive owned properties within the Harbour Ward Bangor and therefore no expenditure has been incurred on Planned or Response Maintenance in the area. The Housing Executive has advised that there has been no Private Sector Grants expenditure in the Harbour Ward in the past financial year and there have been no social housing newbuild schemes by Housing Associations within the Ward over the past year.

Co-ownership Scheme

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development how many properties have been purchased through the Co-Ownership scheme in each of the last five years, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 8308/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not readily available in the format requested. The table below details the number of homes purchased under the Co-Ownership Scheme in each of the last financial years, broken down by Council area.

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Derry City Council	30	67	7	16	12
Limavady Borough Council	3	8	1	6	8
Coleraine Borough Council	10	19	4	7	1
Ballymoney Borough Council	3	7	4	8	9
Moyle District Council	0	0	1	2	1

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Larne Borough Council	7	32	9	1	2
Ballymena Borough Council	11	32	9	11	19
Magherafelt District Council	0	10	0	2	3
Cookstown District Council	2	6	3	5	8
Strabane District Council	0	12	5	6	3
Omagh District Council	2	6	1	2	2
Fermanagh District Council	2	8	5	4	3
Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council	1	7	2	6	8
Craigavon Borough Council	5	61	33	49	54
Armagh City and District Council	0	3	3	0	1
Newry and Mourne District Council	0	10	5	8	11
Banbridge District Council	5	28	13	13	6
Down District Council	2	23	7	2	13
Lisburn City Council	27	64	45	83	90
Antrim Borough Council	7	28	9	19	17
Newtownabbey Borough Council	38	91	33	42	40
Carrickfergus Borough Council	22	45	9	6	11
North Down Borough Council	47	106	29	33	31
Ards Borough Council	42	74	14	21	26
Castlereagh Borough Council	12	32	13	23	31
Belfast City Council	47	156	61	86	82
Total	325	935	325	461	492

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Co-ownership Scheme

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development how many (i) first-time buyers; and (ii) second-time buyers have purchased a property through the Co-Ownership scheme in each of the last five years. **(AQW 8309/11-15)**

Mr McCausland: Due to the exceptional level of demand experienced by the Co-Ownership Scheme during a period of constrained resources, the scheme was restricted to first-time buyers only from the 2008/09 financial year until the latter half of the current financial year. Therefore, those assisted in the 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11 financial years were all first-time buyers.

The table below details the number of (i) first-time buyers and (ii) non first-time buyers who purchased a home through the Co-Ownership Scheme in each of the last five years.

Year	First-Time Buyer	Non First-Time Buyer	Total
2006/07	309	16	325
2007/08	887	48	935
2008/09	325	0	325
2009/10	461	0	461
2010/11	492	0	492

Poverty: Constituency Breakdown

Ms J McCann asked the Minister for Social Development, in each year between 2001 and 2011, to detail, for each constituency, the percentage of (i) people living in income poverty; (ii) children living in poverty; and (iii) children living in severe child poverty.

(AQW 8322/11-15)

Mr McCausland: During the years between 2002-03 and 2009-10 the percentage of people living below the relative income poverty line for each Westminster Parliamentary Constituency is presented in Table 1, based on three year averages. The percentage of children living below the relative income poverty line for each Westminster Parliamentary Constituency is presented in Table 2, based on four year averages. The results are produced using the Family Resources Survey datasets for Northern Ireland, and the Households Below Average Income datasets for Northern Ireland.

Severe child poverty results for Westminster Parliamentary Constituencies are not available due to small sample sizes.

TABLE 1: PERCENTAGE OF INDIVIDUALS IN RELATIVE LOW INCOME POVERTY

Westminster Parliamentary Constituency	2007-08 to 2009-10	2006-07 to 2008-09	2005-06 to 2007-08	2004-05 to 2006-07	2003-04 to 2005-06	2002-03 to 2004-05
Belfast East	17	16	17	12	..	..
Belfast North	27	24	27	25	24	22
Belfast South	14	14	11	12	..	..
Belfast West	31	30	26	24	20	25
East Antrim	25	22	24	22	21	17
East Londonderry	26	24	19	19	21	24
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	28	27	28	28	29	25
Foyle	32	27	27	26	27	26
Lagan Valley	15	13	12	11	10	9
Mid Ulster	27	26	23	24	26	31
Newry and Armagh	18	17	18	21	20	18
North Antrim	19	21	24	22	24	20
North Down	16	16	18	17	16	14

Westminster Parliamentary Constituency	2007-08 to 2009-10	2006-07 to 2008-09	2005-06 to 2007-08	2004-05 to 2006-07	2003-04 to 2005-06	2002-03 to 2004-05
South Antrim	21	15	16	15	16	16
South Down	24	20	20	20	20	20
Strangford	11	10	14	21	26	25
Upper Bann	21	23	20	20	15	17
West Tyrone	23	23	20	21	27	31
Northern Ireland	22	20	20	21	21	21

TABLE 2: PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN IN RELATIVE LOW INCOME POVERTY

Westminster Parliamentary Constituency	2006-07 to 2009-10	2005-06 to 2008-09	2004-05 to 2007-08	2003-04 to 2006-07	2002-03 to 2005-06
Belfast East	..	..	..	..	..
Belfast North	29	26	29	25	28
Belfast South	..	..	..	..	..
Belfast West	40	34	33	30	29
East Antrim	..	29	26	..	..
East Londonderry	29	23	23	27	27
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	32	33	35	34	32
Foyle	40	40	37	35	37
Lagan Valley	..	..	..	..	..
Mid Ulster	31	31	28	30	31
Newry and Armagh	27	25	24	25	24
North Antrim	..	21	19	25	22
North Down	..	..	..	..	..
South Antrim	..	..	..	19	20
South Down	23	24	25	..	24
Strangford	..	..	26	32	32
Upper Bann	24	21	22	23	23
West Tyrone	26	25	20	..	27
Northern Ireland	25	24	24	25	26

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Neighbourhood Renewal Areas: Funding

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 5538/11-15, to provide a breakdown of the £140 million spend on Neighbourhood Renewal areas in each of the last seven years, including (i) the level of funding allocated to each Neighbourhood Renewal area; (ii) to where the funding was allocated; and (iii) for what purpose.
(AQW 8324/11-15)

Mr McCausland:

- (i) As advised in the response to AQW 5538/11-15, the total Neighbourhood Renewal expenditure from 2004/05 to 2010/11 was £123.73m. The breakdown of this by Neighbourhood Renewal Area for the 7 years is shown below.

Neighbourhood Renewal Area	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	Total
Outer West Belfast - Colin	241,479	275,836	1,004,489	935,276	1,115,511	1,084,100	1,095,288	5,751,979
Upper Ardoyne	6,049	47,036	79,212	218,865	119,024	468,588	548,693	1,487,466
Ligoniel	0	0	0	34,560	271	312,106	56,013	402,950
Greater Shankill	6,869	386,107	1,385,686	1,251,880	1,195,828	1,676,223	978,474	6,881,067
Inner East Belfast	317,468	581,832	826,145	1,884,673	1,040,484	1,966,852	2,228,363	8,845,817
Outer West Belfast - Lenadoon	33,337	161,855	602,344	437,633	272,177	261,476	352,560	2,121,383
Upper Springfield/Whiterock	169,688	479,245	976,731	1,536,123	1,288,344	1,081,652	969,696	6,501,479
South West Belfast		161,825	418,228	590,949	675,607	719,745	701,796	3,268,149
Inner North Belfast	15,619	451,120	878,742	1,119,588	5,525,671	1,853,700	978,217	10,822,657
Inner South Belfast		119,833	249,077	430,054	563,103	1,142,337	509,028	3,013,432
Lower Falls/Clonard	229,631	617,608	1,279,854	1,273,909	1,212,798	2,781,952	1,702,375	9,098,127

Neighbourhood Renewal Area	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	Total
Tullycarnet	6,382	73,165	91,545	101,414	539,241	141,228	39,591	992,565
Crumlin/Ardoyne	111,105	529,937	747,976	713,262	564,245	184,128	748,425	3,599,079
Rathcoole	0	0	0	36,999	54,281	68,256	52,413	211,948
Andersonstown	0	672	0	28,222	237,913	543,301	182,766	992,874
Suffolk	0	2,023	0	24,582	32,582	34,190	29,748	123,126
Triax	38,359	673,918	1,281,477	1,128,934	823,695	1,151,964	979,092	6,077,439
Outer North	14,175	490,207	831,721	874,855	661,368	1,145,697	581,465	4,599,489
Outer West	10,615	301,699	645,510	773,323	428,727	467,639	227,825	2,855,339
Strabane	0	149,633	350,176	165,369	430,590	452,265	382,848	1,930,882
Waterside	6,885	166,298	603,424	626,508	658,131	901,287	919,231	3,881,765
Limavady	0	7,401	95,077	233,946	117,807	181,351	259,421	895,004
Strathfoyle	0	4,343	18,775	0	0	0	16,900	40,018
Coleraine East (Ballysally)	50,000	41,150	161,389	225,382	614,234	100,093	99,931	1,292,180
Coleraine West (Churchlands)	15,210	60,195	107,504	325,801	5,766	13,176	32,590	560,241
Ballyclare	1,895	75,375	353,455	76,368	18,561	119,616	28,378	673,649
Downpatrick	957	224	77,390	137,552	363,473	102,712	65,845	748,154
Newry	11,266	30,408	400,733	942,083	357,328	446,806	721,941	2,910,564
Bangor	29,855	252,429	99,172	131,188	149,495	260,175	169,987	1,092,302
Armagh	0	120,412	350,705	656,685	207,688	387,062	302,872	2,025,424

Neighbourhood Renewal Area	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	Total
Omagh	0	31,072	65,111	46,616	264,638	264,019	365,268	1,036,724
Lurgan	0	52,787	5,805	135,189	672,982	1,180,435	346,947	2,394,144
Portadown	0	30,425	93,582	202,386	159,572	67,855	53,271	607,091
Ballymena	299,719	350,655	797,815	763,343	377,008	312,904	407,367	3,308,813
Brownlow	0	0	0	6,917	386,303	642,358	354,773	1,390,351
Coalisland	0	0	0	6,588	88,818	269,865	114,726	479,997
Enniskillen	0	0	0	16,827	63,351	107,784	253,491	441,452
Ballymoney - Newhill	0	0	0	0	0	0	23,960	23,960
Dungannon	82,000	0	125,601	83,844	192,303	209,788	201,495	895,032
Multiple Areas	1,219,422	1,152,868	1,732,808	3,906,372	3,651,441	4,593,386	3,194,798	19,451,094
Total	2,917,984	7,879,595	16,737,261	22,084,068	25,130,359	27,698,069	21,277,869	123,725,204

(ii) Owing to technical difficulties, information for this part of the question cannot be provided in the required format; however, a copy will be placed in the Assembly Library.

(iii) To tackle the complex, multi-dimensional nature of deprivation in an integrated way, Neighbourhood Renewal encompasses four interlinking strategic objectives:

Community Renewal – to develop confident communities that are able and committed to improving the quality of life in the most deprived neighbourhoods;

Economic Renewal – to develop economic activity in the most deprived neighbourhoods and connect them to the wider urban economy;

Social Renewal – to improve social conditions for the people who live in the most deprived neighbourhoods through better co-ordinated public services and the creation of safer environments; and

Physical Renewal – to help create attractive, safe, sustainable environments in the most deprived areas.

In line with these objectives, the Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund has been allocated to provide services where a need has been highlighted and prioritised within individual Neighbourhood Action Plans.

Social Housing: Completed Units

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development how many social housing units will be completed in each council area, in each of the next three years.

(AQW 8332/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Social Housing Development Programme for 2012-15 is currently being finalised. Once approved, it will be published on the Housing Executive website. (www.nihe.gov.uk) and I will advise the member in due course.

Social Housing: Unmet Need

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the current level of unmet need for social housing in each council area; and the projected need in each of the next three years.

(AQW 8333/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The current level of housing need in each council area as currently assessed by the Housing Executive is attached.

In respect of meeting that need, the Social Housing Development Programme for the next 3 years has just recently been submitted to me and I am now considering it. We will publish the final programme once it has been formally approved.

ANNEX A

WAITING LIST & SHDP BY COUNCIL AREA

	Non Housing Stress @ 31/3/11	Housing Stress (30+ points) @ 31/3/11
Belfast City Council	4235	5927
Antrim Borough Council	500	477
Moyle District Council	169	165
Ballymena Borough Council	640	880
Ballymoney Borough Council	336	160
Carrickfergus Borough Council	477	497
Coleraine Borough Council	659	638
Larne Borough Council	373	177
Newtownabbey Borough Council	803	940
Armagh City and District Council	500	302
Banbridge District Council	384	293
Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council	407	615
Fermanagh District Council	507	346
Craigavon Borough Council	1195	727
Newry and Mourne District Council	867	960
North Down Borough Council	924	960
Castlereagh Borough Council	730	732

	Non Housing Stress @ 31/3/11	Housing Stress (30+ points) @ 31/3/11
Down District Council	575	748
Lisburn City Council	1032	1563
Ards Borough Council	719	1092
Cookstown District Council	227	180
Derry City Council	1228	1765
Limavady Borough Council	284	188
Magherafelt District Council	268	244
Omagh District Council	462	160
Strabane District Council	408	230
Grand Total	18909	20966
Outside NI	16	1
Overall Total	39,892	

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Green New Deal: Cost Benefit Analysis

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 7523/11-15, whether the cost benefit analysis of the Green New Deal will include the direct and associated benefits of (i) job creation for the construction industry; (ii) the economy wide multiplier effect, created through lower levels of imported energy consumption; and (iii) a reduction in costs to the Health Service due to lower levels of fuel poverty.

(AQW 8353/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The economic appraisal for the £12m that has been set aside over the next three years for a Green New Deal solution has been developed in accordance with the guidance in the Northern Ireland Guide to Expenditure Appraisal and Evaluation (NIGEAE). The criteria being used for the options within the economic appraisal is to determine the most cost effective way of spending the £12m, ensuring that the maximum benefit is realised from the expenditure. This means that options are assessed on the basis of what they propose to deliver in the context of improving energy efficiency in domestic properties, any associated benefits or costs, wider economic benefits in relation to private sector expenditure, direct job creation/income and multiplier effects. It also assesses any associated risks around the potential to deliver the proposal including where those risks may lie.

Equality Impact Assessments/Consultations: DSD Spend

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how much his Department has spent on (i) Equality Impact Assessments; and (ii) consultations in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8365/11-15)

Mr McCausland:

(i) Equality Impact Assessments

2009/2010	£6857.14
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2010/2011	-
2011/2012	£4938.50

(ii) Consultations

2009/2010	£52777.85
2010/2011	£17694.67
2011/2012	£2596.40

Some EQIAs/consultations have been carried out by the Department where the cost cannot be segregated from the overall cost of the consultancy assignment or were carried out in house as part of normal business and disseminated through the internet. Therefore these costs have not been included in the figures given above.

Housing Executive: Powers to deal with Antisocial Behaviour

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the effectiveness of the anti-social powers which guide the Housing Executive in dealing with tenants with anti-social behaviour, given the requirement for tenants to provide evidence.

(AQW 8366/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive's statutory powers for dealing with anti-social behaviour include power to apply to the court for an order for possession. The court will not grant such an order unless it is satisfied that it would be reasonable to make the order and that there are statutory grounds for making it. Where an application is made on the grounds that the tenant has been guilty of conduct causing nuisance or annoyance to another tenant, it would be reasonable to expect the tenant who has suffered the nuisance or annoyance to provide evidence of this. It is however accepted that there may be circumstances where a tenant is reluctant to give evidence in court. The Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 therefore made provision for the court to make an order for possession where a tenant has been guilty of conduct causing or likely to cause nuisance or annoyance to a person visiting or otherwise engaging in a lawful activity in the locality. This means that any person who has witnessed the anti-social behaviour, such as a police officer or a member of the Housing Executive's staff, may give evidence that can be accepted by the court.

I am not fully satisfied with the range of powers available to the Housing Executive to deal with anti-social behaviour and will be including further proposals within the new Housing Strategy.

Town Centre Masterplans

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to list the dates and venues of the departmental sponsored town centre focused conferences, roadshows and meetings.

(AQW 8369/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Department for Social Development is responsible for the implementation of programmes which target social need and seek to address the social, economic and physical regeneration of cities, towns and villages in Northern Ireland. To this end the Department, in partnership with local Councils, develops town centre masterplans, which will ensure the development of a cohesive and sustainable regeneration strategy. While the town centre masterplans are developed in partnership with the councils, responsibility for associated events normally lies with the local council. However, in the case of the Bangor Town Centre Masterplan the Department provided a small amount of funding to facilitate the following events:

Date	Venue	
13.05.10	Marine Court Hotel	Queen's Parade Community Engagement Partnership Meetings.
02.06.10	Marine Court Hotel	
19.10.10	Marine Court Hotel	
21.10.11	Marine Court Hotel	

Homelessness: Single Young Men

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development how many single young men, aged between 18 and 30, are registered as homeless in each constituency.

(AQW 8382/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not routinely collate information by Parliamentary constituency, nor can they disaggregate their figures. However the table below shows the number of men in the age range 18-25 and 26-59 years awarded Full Duty Applicant Status, by Housing Executive District Office for the year 2010-11.

District Office	18-25 year old men awarded Full Duty Applicant	26-59 year old men awarded Full Duty Applicant
Belfast (West)	26	113
Belfast 2 (East)	27	46
Belfast 4 (North)	45	112
Belfast 5 (Shankill)	18	26
Belfast 7 (South)	49	93
Homeless Services Unit	0	54
Bangor	23	52
Castlereagh	54	65
Newtownards	24	46
Lisburn	34	91
Dairyfarm (Poleglass)	15	31
Downpatrick	13	56
Armagh	4	16
Newry	8	63
Banbridge	10	21
Lurgan / Brownlow	4	28
Portadown	4	18
Dungannon	13	46
Fermanagh	7	28
Ballymena	29	58
Antrim	23	74

District Office	18-25 year old men awarded Full Duty Applicant	26-59 year old men awarded Full Duty Applicant
Newtownabbey 1	8	29
Newtownabbey 2	12	30
Carrickfergus	2	30
Larne	11	24
Ballycastle	2	17
Ballymoney	6	15
Coleraine	20	46
Waterloo Place	12	43
Waterside	11	30
Collon Terrace	17	53
Limavady	15	43
Magherafelt	7	16
Strabane	2	18
Omagh	6	23
Cookstown	3	18

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Homelessness: Single Young Men

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development to outline his Department's policy for addressing the high volume of single young men, aged between 18 and 30, who cannot access social housing.

(AQW 8383/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Social housing cannot be the only answer to the housing needs of single young men, just as it cannot be the only answer to each of the 40,000 applicants on the waiting list.

We clearly need to find a more holistic and sustainable solution to housing need for all who need a home. The forthcoming welfare reform changes will have a particular impact on a wide range of younger people and we are undertaking some research at the minute to identify the scale of that impact.

In the meantime I plan to bring forward a new housing strategy that will seek to create more choice, opportunity and provide access to a wider range of people to whom social housing cannot meet their needs and this will be announced in the coming months.

Street Trading Licences: Transfer

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development whether he will consider amending the law to permit the transfer of established street trading licences, other than temporary licences, to allow retiring traders to sell their businesses or pass them on to family members.

(AQW 8436/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The overall purpose of the Street Trading Act (Northern Ireland) 2001 is to enable district councils to regulate street trading in their areas in such a way as to prevent undue nuisance,

interference and inconvenience to other persons or vehicles. Permitting the transfer of licences between street traders would undermine district councils' fundamental autonomy not only in deciding which areas to designate as suitable for trading pitches but also to whom and for what period licences should be granted. Therefore I am of the opinion that it would be inappropriate to consider such an amendment to the legislation.

Craigavon Integrated Development Framework

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the issuing of development briefs for town centre sites in Lurgan and Portadown, consistent with the identified priority sites for regeneration in the 2010 Craigavon Integrated Development Framework.

(AQW 8455/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department has been working closely with Craigavon Borough Council to take forward the Castle Lane development site in Lurgan and the Portadown Gateway sites. DSD appointed consultants in August 2010 to assist with the regeneration of these key sites and it is expected that a development brief will issue for the Castle Lane site in Lurgan later this year. It has also been agreed that further work is required on infrastructure improvements in Portadown before any development brief can be issued for the Portadown Gateway sites.

DSD, along with Craigavon Borough Council, are exploring how to deliver the necessary infrastructure improvements to enable regeneration to take place in the future in Portadown.

Development Briefs: Regeneration Projects

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of development briefs issued to date by his Department for regeneration projects, including the location and status of each project.

(AQW 8456/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below lists the location and current status of development briefs for regeneration projects issued by my Department since April 2009.

Project location	Current status
Mall West, Armagh	Evaluation process to appoint preferred developer ongoing.
Curran Street/Obins Street, Portadown	Unable to appoint preferred developer. Negotiations to sell the site for social housing are ongoing.
232 Newtownards Road, Belfast	No proposals received. Site currently being maintained by the Department and will be held pending an improvement in market conditions.
294-296 Crumlin Road, Belfast	No proposals received. Site currently being maintained by the Department and will be held pending an improvement in market conditions.
130-138 Castlereagh St & 60-64 Clondeboye St, Belfast	No proposals received. Site currently being maintained by the Department and will be held pending an improvement in market conditions.
141-145 Shankill Road, Belfast	Deadline for proposals was noon 23 February 2012.

Development Briefs: Town Centres

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how many development briefs for town centres his Department intends to publish between now and the next local government election; and (ii) the location of each project.

(AQW 8457/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Development briefs for town centres that are programmed for publication between now and the next local government election are set out in the following table:

Town	Location
Antrim	Central Car Park
	Railway Street/Church Street
Ballymena	Bridge Street
Craigavon	Central Craigavon Development Site
Downpatrick	The Grove, Market Street
Dungannon	Scotch Street
Lisburn	Antrim Street Car Park
	Smithfield Car Park
Lurgan	Castle Lane Car Park
Omagh	Dublin Road/Kelvin Avenue
Portrush	Castle Erin
Strabane	Canal Street/Dock Street

This future programme is dependent on budget and the availability of resources. Development briefs for other sites may emerge as my Department works with district councils and other stakeholders to bring forward opportunities for development that have been identified in Town Centre Masterplans.

Development Briefs: Town Centres

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department has decided not to progress some development briefs for town centres because it intends to pass responsibility for them to the new super councils post 2015.

(AQW 8458/11-15)

Mr McCausland: No development briefs have been held back by my Department because it is intended that responsibility for them will pass to the new enlarged local authorities proposed to be created in 2015 under the review of Public Administration.

Girdwood: Regeneration of North Belfast

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Girdwood site as a catalyst for regeneration of North Belfast.

(AQW 8484/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My department has always recognised the value and importance of the Girdwood site in the wider context of North Belfast and is supportive of any approach to develop Girdwood in a manner that will bring benefit to and have the support of the whole community. My department is currently reviewing the implementation of the draft masterplan for the Girdwood site and former Crumlin Road Gaol. Following consultation with OFMDFM and other stakeholders I aim to announce the way forward as soon as possible.

Crumlin Road Courthouse: Redevelopment

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the importance of the regeneration of the Crumlin Road Courthouse to the site of the Jail and Courthouse in realising its full potential.
(AQW 8485/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Courthouse is identified as a priority site for development in the draft Crumlin Road to Lower Oldpark Physical Regeneration Concept Masterplan, which is due to be published in its final form in summer 2012. The Masterplan, which was developed at a time when the owner was considering a hotel development at the site, also proposes complementary development at the sites adjacent to the Courthouse for commercial, residential and retail uses.

Girdwood: Tourism and Social Enterprises

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development whether the Girdwood site will be given urgent attention and whether priority will be given to the potential for tourism and social enterprises.
(AQW 8486/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My department is currently reviewing the implementation of the draft masterplan for the Girdwood site and former Crumlin Road Gaol. Following consultation with OFMDFM and other stakeholders I aim to announce the way forward as soon as possible. As part of the implementation review my department is considering what priority should be given to all of the uses for the site proposed in the draft masterplan including the potential for tourism and mixed-use development.

ReStore Programme, Carrickfergus: Funding

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 1670/11-15, what funding will be made available under the ReStore Programme in Carrickfergus.
(AQW 8487/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The level of grant funding available for a ReStore project or similar type of town centre revitalisation scheme is up to £150,000 for each location or town centre. The exact content of each scheme is decided by a representative group of traders, but projects typically focus on improving the appearance of building frontages and some forms of promotional and marketing activity designed to attract more people into the town centre.

Funding for a scheme in Carrickfergus town centre is currently scheduled in the Department's capital expenditure programme in 2013/14. Any offer of funding for the scheme will be subject to a satisfactory business case and appraisal being completed and necessary approvals being granted. The timing of the scheme is designed to follow after the current public realm works in the town centre have been completed as combining public realm and revitalisation projects in this way has been found to be more effective.

Housing Executive: Annadale Flats Roof Repairs

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister for Social Development how much has been spent on repairs to the roofs of the Annadale Flats, South Belfast, to make them watertight, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 8539/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has spent £23,320.84 on repairs to the roofs of the Annadale Flats in the last three years broken down as follows:-

2009	£1,308.65
2010	£16,540.15
2011	£5,472.04

The Housing Executive is currently developing a programme for replacing the roofs of the flats commencing in the 2012/13 financial year, dependent on the availability of funding.

Disability Living Allowance: Alcoholics

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development how his Department ensures that the payment of Disability Living Allowance for people who suffer from alcohol addiction is used to improve their circumstances and is not counter productive.

(AQW 8583/11-15)

Mr McCausland: One of the purposes of Disability Living Allowance is to promote independence and freedom of choice for disabled people. There is therefore no requirement for recipients to use their benefit for any particular purpose and they are free to choose how they spend it.

Disability Living Allowance is paid as a contribution towards the disability-related extra costs faced by severely disabled people. It is not paid to people because they are addicted to alcohol. Entitlement depends on the effect a person's disability or illness has on their need for personal care and/or their ability to walk rather than their specific disability or diagnosis. Alcoholics who, for example, need a high level of care because of a physical disability resulting from their illness, may qualify for Disability Living Allowance.

Payment to another person can be considered in individual cases where there is evidence that it is necessary to protect the interests of the beneficiary or a dependant for whom the benefit is paid. In such cases my Department can direct that all or part of the benefit be paid to another person on the beneficiary's behalf.

Welfare Reform: Discussions with DWP

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister for Social Development what discussions he has held with Ministers in the Department for Work and Pensions regarding mitigation measures in respect of Welfare Reform proposals.

(AQW 8595/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I have had a number of discussions with Lord Freud, the Department for Work and Pensions Minister for Welfare Reform, and Maria Miller, the Department for Work and Pensions Minister for Disabled People, on a range of issues arising from the Coalition Government's Welfare Reform programme. These discussions have included specific challenges that may arise from the implementation of the proposed Welfare Reform changes in Northern Ireland.

Officials from my Department continue to be involved in discussions on all aspects of the Welfare Reform programme with their counterparts in the Department for Work and Pensions. As part of this ongoing work I have instructed officials to identify those areas where there may be scope for alternative arrangements to be made for the delivery of the various elements of Welfare Reform in Northern Ireland.

Housing Executive: Ministerial Meetings

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister for Social Development when he is next due to meet with the Board of the Housing Executive; and what items will be for discussion.

(AQW 8598/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am meeting the Board of the Housing Executive on Wednesday 29 February about the fundamental review of the NIHE and my housing priorities.

Housing: Waiting Lists in Strabane and Omagh

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the changes in the number of people on the housing waiting lists in the Strabane and Omagh district council areas in the last 12 months.

(AQW 8599/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information contained in the table below gives details of applicants registered on the Waiting List for the areas in question between 30 June 2010 and 30 June 2011, which is the most up to date information available.

	Omagh	Strabane
Applicants on the Waiting List as at 30 June 2010	620	551
Applicants on the Waiting List as at 30 June 2011	598	652
Applicants in Housing Stress (30 or more Points) as at 30 June 2010	149	194
Applicants in Housing Stress (30 or more Points) as at 30 June 2011	159	240

Housing Executive: Vacant Properties in North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive properties in the North Down constituency are vacant.

(AQW 8604/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not routinely collate information by Parliamentary constituency. However, the Housing Executive's Bangor District Office, which covers the North Down constituency, has confirmed that they had 59 vacant properties at 31 January 2012. Of these, 13 were categorised as awaiting relet, 10 pending sale/demolition and 36 undergoing repairs or are vacant for decanting purposes.

Social Security (Loss of Benefit) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development, following the debate on Monday 20 February 2012, on the Social Security (Loss of Benefit) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011, whether he will undertake a financial assessment of the cost that would have been incurred on an annual basis if the Motion had been defeated and the Department for Work and Pensions had regarded this as a breach of parity.

(AQW 8607/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Statement of Funding Policy provides that social security benefits in Northern Ireland are funded on the same model as in Great Britain, in line with actual entitlement of claimants. It also states that if the Northern Ireland Executive change social security policy to differ from the rest of the United Kingdom, United Kingdom Ministers will need to take a view on whether and how to adjust this funding. It would, therefore, fall to the Westminster Government to consider if parity had been breached and any associated costs if the Motion had been defeated. Ultimately any such consideration has the potential to put the overall funding of £4.9bn at risk.

Divergence from the Loss of Benefit provisions as enacted for Great Britain would also impact on the level of deterrence. The Social Security Agency has successfully delivered reductions in the estimated levels of fraud in the benefit system, with losses through fraud down to 0.5% of expenditure, equivalent to £20.5m. While difficult to place specific values on the impact of deterrence, any variations on the current levels of fraud carry significant financial impact, with for example an increase of 0.1% equating to increased losses of around £4m per year.

Housing Executive: Homelessness Strategy 2012-17

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development what progress has been made on the Housing Executive's Homelessness Strategy.

(AQW 8610/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Homelessness Strategy 2012/2017 is almost finalised and it is proposed to publish the strategy in early to late Spring 2012.

Boiler Replacement Scheme: Extension

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development whether he plans to extend the pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme which ends on 31 March 2012.

(AQW 8833/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme has been very successful and the Housing Executive is no longer taking applications for the scheme. The scheme will close on 31 March and will then be subject to a full evaluation which will determine if the pilot scheme should continue.

Installers engaged in carrying out boiler replacement for applications which have already been approved, should ensure works have been completed and electrical certificate and Building Control certificates are submitted to their local Grant Office before 31 March 2012.

Advice Services: Funding

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development why funding for Advice Services lasts for only one year, whilst funding for Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships covers a period of three years. [R]

(AQW 8981/11-15)

Mr McCausland: DSD supports regional advice services through the Regional Infrastructure Programme which funds Advice NI, Citizens Advice NI and the Law Centre NI. Contracts for funding to these organisations currently cover a one year period. The Department is now putting in place arrangements to fund regional advice services over a period of 2 years and 6 months from 1 October 2012. Funding for frontline advice services is provided through DSD's Community Support Programme (CSP) and delivered through 26 local councils who contribute additional support for frontline advice services from their own resources. DSD funds annual CSP contracts to councils who are responsible for the commissioning of local advice services for their own areas.

Additionally DSD's North West Development Office funds specific posts in advice projects in its Neighbourhood Renewal areas. These projects have been invited to apply for Neighbourhood Renewal funding for the period April 2012 to March 2013 and this funding is added to the one-year CSP allocations administered by the local councils. During this period the Department intends to work with these organisations and with the local councils to explore ways of maximising the benefits from the resources invested in these projects.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Parliament Buildings: Content of Tour

Mr McKay asked the Assembly Commission, in relation to the tour of Parliament Buildings (i) what reference is made to the old Stormont Parliament of 1921-72; and (ii) whether the views that nationalists held of the old Stormont Parliament are referred to, in order to provide a balanced overview.

(AQW 8108/11-15)

Mr McElduff (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The aim of the tour of Parliament Buildings is to provide an insight into the day-to-day procedural work of the Assembly. In addition, the tour aims to highlight the building's architecture and usage. As the duration of the tour is only 45 minutes, it is not possible to cover every aspect of the procedural work, architecture and history of usage. The core script for the tour was approved by the Assembly Commission in 2001. The tour does not make reference to the Old Stormont Parliament (1921-72) beyond its usage of Parliament Buildings.

Parliament Buildings: Video-conferencing Facilities

Mr Flanagan asked the Assembly Commission to detail (i) the video-conferencing facilities available at Parliament Buildings; (ii) on how many occasions the facilities have been used in each of the last four

years; and (iii) what plans are in place to improve the uptake of the facilities to save on unnecessary travel for MLAs and staff.

(AQW 8378/11-15)

Mr McElduff (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):

- (i) Video-conferencing facilities are currently available in Room 30 and Room 54. The video-conferencing unit was installed in Room 30 in February 2010 and in Room 54 in October 2010. The video-conferencing facility is only available in Room 30 if a television screen has been requested for use as a permanent television has not been installed in this room.
- (ii) No records have been kept in relation to the use of the videoconferencing in Room 30; however, it has been used by at least two Committees since its installation.

Since 2010 the Education Service has organised ten video conferences involving approximately 25 MLAs and a range of schools.

Date & Location	School(s) involved	Focus of Video Conference
27 April 2010 (Room 30)	Lurgan College (Upper Bann)	A Level Business Studies students had a question and answer session with Members of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee
21 June 2010 (Room 30)	Lumen Christi College (Foyle)	A group of students took part in a video link with Foyle MLAs and had a question and answer session on local issues
23 November 2010 (Room 54)	Sperrin Integrated College and Magherafelt High School (Mid Ulster)	Students had a joint question & answer session with Mid Ulster MLAs
24 November 2010 (Room 54)	Glengormley High School (North Belfast)	A group of students presented 'vertical registration', a new initiative in the school, to Members of the Education Committee
15 December 2010 (Room 54)	Methodist College Belfast (South Belfast)	A Level Politics students had a question and session with South Belfast MLAs
21 Feb 2011 (Room 54)	1. Our Lady of Lourdes PS, Belfast 2. Moat Primary School Lisnaskea 3. Knockloughrim PS, Magherafelt 4. St Patrick's PS, Crossmaglen 5. Millennium Integrated PS Carryduff	The Education Minister had a question and answer session with a range of schools concurrently to launch Video Conference Festival week
26 September 2011 (Room 54)	St Malachy's, Castlewellen (south Down)	A question and answer session with Willie Clarke MLA

Date & Location	School(s) involved	Focus of Video Conference
26 September 2011 (Room 54)	St Macartan's, Loughinisland (south Down)	A question and answer session with C McDevitt MLA
27 September 2011 (Room 54)	St Bernard's Primary School (south Antrim)	A question and answer session with P Girvan MLA
27 September 2011 (Room 54)	St MacNissi's Primary School (south Antrim)	A question and answer session with D McNarry MLA and D Kinahan MLA

- (iii) Information on video-conferencing is available to schools on the Education Service section of the Assembly website.

The Education Service is currently developing the use of 'Elluminate'. This is a web conferencing programme where virtual rooms are used to facilitate meetings or classes. It is envisaged that teachers will 'dial in' from their classroom computer to Education Officers.

The video-conferencing facilities are available to Members and have been booked by parties for their use. Records are not kept of this usage.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 9 March 2012

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Victims and Survivors Service

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, following the evidence given to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister by the Commission for Victims and Survivors, whether the establishment of the new Victims and Survivors Service will require legislation to be passed by the Assembly, and what timescale will apply.

(AQW 8646/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): Approval has been given by the Department of Finance and Personnel to establish the new Victims and Survivors Service under the Budget Act. This is sufficient to cover at least the first year of operation. We are currently considering whether new legislation is necessary for any aspect of the work after this one-year period.

European Economic and Social Committee

Mr Lunn asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the impact that the work of the European Economic and Social Committee has on Northern Ireland.

(AQO 1365/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The European Economic and Social Committee is a consultative body that gives representatives of Europe's socio-occupational interest groups, and others, a formal platform to express their own, non-governmental, points of view on EU issues.

The opinions of the Committee are part of the formal legislative process in Brussels and can positively influence decisions which affect this administration, helping to ensure that European policies and legislation reflect economic, social and civic circumstances 'on the ground.'

In some areas its view, or 'opinion', must be sought before legislation can be agreed. This includes important policy sectors for us, such as agriculture, employment, transport, education, consumer protection, health and structural funds.

We are currently represented on the Committee by Jane Morrice, a communications consultant, and Michael Smyth, Head of the School of Economics of the University of Ulster.

Recent work carried out by Jane Morrice has made a positive contribution to our lobbying strategy on a PEACE IV Programme. We are pursuing this, building on commitments by Commissioner Hahn concerning continued EU support for Peace funding which we have secured as part of our work with the Barroso Task Force.

We will continue to press for a PEACE IV programme in our dealings with Dublin, London and Brussels.

Workplace Discrimination

Mr D McIlveen asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action their Department has taken to reduce discrimination in the workplace against pregnant women, young people and migrant workers.

(AQW 8752/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Discrimination against pregnant women, young people and migrant workers in the workplace is unlawful under legislation as set out below.

- Pregnant women – Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976, as amended
- Young people – Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (NI) 2006, as amended
- Migrant workers – Race Relations (NI) Order 1997, as amended

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is a non-departmental public body sponsored by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). The Equality Commission has responsibility for combating discrimination and provides advice and assistance to people who believe they have suffered such discrimination as well as advising employers of their responsibilities under the laws concerned.

Trade Union: Secondment

Mr McCallister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the number of (a) full-time; and (b) part-time staff who are currently on secondment from their Department, or its arm's length bodies, to each recognised trade union; (ii) the salary scale for each secondee; and (iii) the length of each secondment to date.

(AQW 8782/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: No staff are seconded from OFMDFM or its arm's length bodies to a trade union.

Ethnic Minority Development Fund

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what consideration they have given to extending the funding for groups which receive core funding from the Ethnic Minority Development Fund, given that it is unlikely that the funding applications will be processed by the time the current round of funding expires on 31 March 2012.

(AQW 8919/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We are conscious that any gaps in funding may have a detrimental impact on services provided to minority ethnic people and we are examining all possible options to minimise any such impact.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Sheep/Cattle Imports

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) how many calves for rearing, and store cattle for fattening, were imported in the last three years; (ii) from where these animals were imported; and (iii) whether any of the source countries has had any instances of the Schmallenberg Virus in either sheep or cattle.

(AQW 8506/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): According to my Department's Animal & Public Health Information System (APHIS) there have been 150,231 cattle imported under breeding and production certification during the last 3 years (1 January 2009 to 28 February 2012). These cattle were imported from the south, Britain and countries within Continental Europe including

Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Holland and Romania and I have detailed below the amount of cattle imported per year from each country.

	2009	2010	2011	2012 (to date)
Austria	-	28	44	83
Britain	311	578	1,907	310
Denmark	1	-	-	10
France	8	11	19	171
Germany	-	41	55	-
Holland	28	107	391	29
Ireland	46,638	63,445	32,323	2,337
Romania	-	-	1,065	291
Total:	46,986	64,210	35,804	3,231

The source countries where the Schmallenberg Virus has been detected in cattle and sheep include Britain, France, Germany and Holland and a small percentage of cattle have been imported from those countries. The number of cattle imported since June 2011 are as follows:

Britain	France	Germany	Holland
1,711	190	20	219

Fishing Vessel: Decommissioning Timescale

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, following her statement on 16 January 2012, and pursuant to AQW 6548/11-15, whether an announcement will be made on a definite timescale for fishing vessel decommissioning in February 2012.

(AQW 8543/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have not been able to make an announcement about vessel decommissioning in February as I had hoped. Senior departmental officials met with DFP on 7 February to discuss the proposed rationale for a decommissioning scheme. DFP raised some issues requiring additional consideration in DARD's draft business case. DFP further advised that by fully addressing these matters it would help to facilitate a more efficient and timely approval pathway. These issues have now been addressed fully and the Final Business Case was submitted formally to DFP on 1st March 2012. I will make an announcement as soon as DFP's views are known.

Rural Development Programme

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much funding has been allocated to date to each of the Rural Development Programme clusters; and how much each cluster has spent on administering the programme.

(AQW 8570/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Axis 3 of the NIRDP 20007-2013 is administered by seven local council clusters using the 'bottom up' approach. Each cluster has been given an indicative allocation of funds not actual funds. To 31st January 2012 the clusters have spent against their programme allocation as follows:

Cluster	Allocation	Project Spend	Admin Spend
GROW	8,890,899	1,480,765	579,973

Cluster	Allocation	Project Spend	Admin Spend
NER	13,181,300	2,198,665	962,112
LRP	8,691,556	872,406	689,283
DRAP	13,498,066	1,665,270	921,019
SOAR	16,731,839	1,775,988	1,256,558
ARC	18,484,112	2,659,993	1,389,390
SWARD	20,522,227	3,379,960	1,646,689
Total	99,999,999	14,033,047	7,445,024

Anaerobic Digesters/Wind Turbines: Funding

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what funding or incentives her Department has in place for installing anaerobic digesters and erecting wind turbines.

(AQW 8628/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: DARD funding is available for anaerobic digesters under the Biomass Processing Challenge Fund which is managed under the European Sustainable Competitiveness Programme for NI 2007-2013 and part financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

The aim of the Fund is to encourage agricultural and forestry businesses to install biomass fuelled technologies primarily to aid agricultural activities at farm level.

A grant rate of up to 40% of eligible costs, to a maximum of €400,000 per project may be paid, however the Renewable Obligation will have an impact on the financial assistance provided. It is anticipated that Tranche 2 will open in summer 2012.

Additionally under Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme grant assistance may be provided for standalone renewable initiatives including the erection of wind turbines or for projects where renewable energy technology is planned as part of the larger project. None of the energy produced may be used to increase the profitability of a farm business or reduce any farm home domestic running costs.

Private promoters which include farmers and farm family members and rural micro businesses (less than 10 employees) may be offered financial assistance at a rate of up to 50% of eligible costs up to a maximum grant amount of £50,000. Social Economy Enterprises and Community Groups seeking to introduce renewable technologies can be funded at a rate of 75% of eligible costs up to a maximum grant amount of £170,000 depending on the measure applied to. A feasibility study is a Programme requirement and as an eligible cost may be supported through technical assistance at similar grant rates up to a maximum grant amount of £5,000.

The Axis 3 measures are delivered by seven Joint Council Committees working in partnership with their appointed Local Action Group. As a Programme requirement only projects which are compatible with the priorities in the local rural development strategy and which have been successful in a competitive assessment, including robust economic appraisal, will be supported.

Postgraduate Studentship

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to list the universities at which successful Postgraduate Studentship applicants have studied; and how many successful applicants studied at each university in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8654/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The universities at which successful Postgraduate Studentship applicants funded by DARD have been registered for study (at PhD level) are;

- Queen's University Belfast,
- University of Ulster,
- Durham University.

Each successful applicant must be registered at a university, but may carry out their research at an approved study centre, such as the Agri-food and Biosciences Institute for NI (AFBI) or the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE). The following table shows how many successful applicants were registered at each university in each of the last three academic years and highlights the study centres attended.

Registered university	Queen's University Belfast			University of Ulster	Durham University	Total PhDs
	QUB	AFBI	CAFRE	UU	Durham	
2011/12	12	8	1	0	1	22
2010/11	11	10	1	1	0	23
2009/10	14	8	0	1	0	23

As each Postgraduate Studentship is for a three year period, the maximum number of students funded in any one year is twenty four.

Postgraduate Studentship

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many Postgraduate Studentship places her Department has provided in each of the last three years; and how much funding for these places has been provided over the same period.

(AQW 8655/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: DARD awards up to eight new Postgraduate Studentships at PhD level per year. Each Studentship lasts for up to three years. Over the last three academic years, the total number of Studentships and funding provided in each year has been as follows;

Academic year	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10
Number of Studentships provided	22	23	23
Total funding provided (£)	417,714	430,583	421,935

Schmallenberg Virus

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she is taking to prevent the spread of the Schmallenberg Virus in livestock.

(AQW 8659/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Schmallenberg virus (SBV) is an emerging virus that has caused disease in cattle, sheep and goats in mainland Europe and southern Britain. There are still many uncertainties around this new virus, such as the vector responsible for transmission, the geographic distribution, transmissibility of infected animals and the virus origin. However current data available suggests that the impact of SBV on animal health and production is variable.

This is not a notifiable disease, and as such there are no trade restrictions in place. There are no control measures in place in any of the affected countries in the EU. Indeed a Member State needs to be able to demonstrate freedom if it wants to impose conditions and that is currently not possible. Freedom is currently not demonstrable as there is no test for wide spread surveillance. This virus is not like Bluetongue but more like Akabane, which is not the subject of international trade conditions

Nevertheless DARD is continuing to monitor developments including discussions at the European Commission.

My officials have conducted veterinary risk assessments and consider that the most likely means of spread to the north of Ireland would be via the import of ruminants from affected areas in Britain and Europe.

My officials have written to importers and asked them to source stock responsibly and enquire about the health history of the herds of origin.

Information is available on the DARD and AFBI websites. Officials have met with representatives from industry and veterinary organisations. Information has also been set to all Private Veterinary Practitioners (PVPs) and to importers.

In order to provide surveillance information here all farmers have been asked to inform their PVPs about any serious malformations or nervous signs in new born animals in their herds or flocks. To date the virus has not been detected in the north of Ireland or indeed the south of Ireland. In addition DARD will assist in a, north of Ireland and Britain, research project.

My officials are in contact with their counterparts in DAFM, DEFRA and the Commission as further information emerges from clinical cases and research. As such any further steps that my Department takes will be evidence based, providing for an informed and proportionate response.

Republican Monument: Crossmaglen

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when the decision was taken that the republican monument at Crossmaglen was eligible for funding under Measure 3.6 of the Rural Development Programme; and why it was not referred to the Executive as a controversial issue.

(AQW 8703/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Advice on eligibility was relayed to the Chair of the SOAR Joint Council Committee (JCC) by my officials on 26 January 2012, following a request by the previous Chair to review earlier advice. I am informed that the eligibility of a project is an operational matter and does not constitute a determination that a project will be funded.

Republican Monument: Crossmaglen

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how and when she became aware that the Crossmaglen republican monument was eligible for funding under Measure 3.6 of the Rural Development Programme.

(AQW 8705/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I was informed on 20 February 2012 about my Department's advice to the JCC in relation to the eligibility of this application.

Republican Monument: Crossmaglen

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the process for the handling of the application following her determination that the republican monument at Crossmaglen was eligible for funding under Measure 3.6 of the Rural Development Programme.

(AQW 8707/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The decision to assess this Project for funding is taken by Southern Organisation for Action in Rural Areas (SOAR). The assessment process involves a site visit, completion of an economic appraisal, full assessment and scoring by the Local Action Group (LAG) assessment panel and consideration by full LAG Committee. The decision of the LAG is passed to the Joint Council Committee (JCC) with a recommendation regarding funding. Final decisions are made by the JCC.

Republican Monument: Crossmaglen

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the content of the additional plaques which are intended to be added to the Crossmaglen republican monument, which she has determined is eligible for funding under Measure 3.6 of the Rural Development Programme. **(AQW 8721/11-15)**

Mrs O'Neill: The proposed plaques are part of an application currently under assessment by Southern Organisation for Action in Rural Areas (SOAR). It would not be appropriate for the Department to divulge their content until such times as the decision process is complete.

Republican Monument: Crossmaglen

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to her decision that the Crossmaglen republican monument is eligible for funding under Measure 3.6 of the Rural Development Programme, what consideration was given to the equality implications and the Ministerial Code of Conduct, in particular the obligations to uphold the rule of law and to promote the interests of the whole community.

(AQW 8723/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Equality considerations are an important part of the assessment process for all projects. The assessment process follows the eligibility determination and has just commenced in relation to this project. I have no involvement in this process so my Ministerial responsibilities can have no bearing on this or any project.

Trade Union: Secondment

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the number of (a) full-time; and (b) part-time staff who are currently on secondment from her Department, or its arm's length bodies, to each recognised trade union; (ii) the salary scale for each secondee; and (iii) the length of each secondment to date.

(AQW 8784/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development currently has four staff on full time secondment to the NI Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) as trade union officials. There is also one full time seconded officer to NIPSA in its Arms Length body. There are no part-time staff on secondment to recognised trade unions. Details of salary and the length of each secondment is set out on the attached table.

DARD

Officer	Grade	Salary Scale	Length of Secondment at Feb 2012
Officer A	Administrative Officer	£18,038 - £22,180	7 years
Officer B	Administrative Officer	£18,038 - £22,180	6 years 9 months
Officer C	Executive Officer I	£23,336- £26,086	3 years 7 months
Officer D	Staff Officer	£27,115- £30,520	10 years

ARMS LENGTH BODIES

	Grade	Salary scale	Length of secondment at Feb 2012
Officer 1	Scientific Officer	£23,336- £26,086	4 years 8 months

DARD Jobs: Enniskillen

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether, given the availability of the former NI Water building in the Killyhevlin Industrial Estate, her Department plans to assess the feasibility of locating more departmental jobs in Enniskillen.

(AQW 8796/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: You will be aware from the draft Programme for Government that I am currently considering the feasibility of relocating the DARD headquarters from Belfast to a rural area. However, to date no decision has been taken on where the proposed new DARD HQ will be located.

The HQ relocation project is subject to the NI Executives appraisal and business case processes. My Department has received approval from DFP in respect of the Strategic Outline Case and my officials are now developing an Outline Business Case – another necessary component in a project of this size.

Dog Attacks: Convictions

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) how many dog attacks on (a) domestic animals; and (b) guide dogs have been reported in each of the last five years; and (ii) how many of the dog owners were (a) prosecuted; and (b) convicted.

(AQW 8801/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Dog control here is legislated for by the Dogs Order 1983, as amended by the Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011. The Councils are responsible for enforcing this legislation and provide statistics to my Department regarding its operation.

The Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011 amended the Dogs Order 1983 to include a number of new provisions, including a new offence to allow a dog to attack and injure any other animal owned by another person. Prior to this provision coming into operation on 28 July 2011, it was not an offence to allow a dog to attack and injure an animal, excluding livestock, owned by another person. The Councils were not required to supply my Department with information regarding dog attacks on domestic pets before this offence came into operation.

Between 28 July 2011 and 31 December 2011, there were 124 investigations into dog attacks on animals owned by other people (excluding livestock). None of these investigations resulted in prosecution. My Department does not hold information on how many of the attacked animals, if any, were guide dogs.

Single Farm Payments: Timescale

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what is the current processing time for Single Farm Payment applications, from inspection to payment.

(AQW 8840/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: It currently takes on average between six and seven months to process a Single Farm Payment after the date on which an inspection was carried out in the field. My Department is currently processing payments on claims inspected during August 2011. A Programme of EU Audit Compliance is currently underway in the Department and this has the potential to result in a significant reduction in this processing time in future years.

Land eligibility inspections were carried out on 1,894 claims to Single Farm Payment (SFP) in 2011. Unfortunately, inspections have discovered that quite a number of claimants have claimed ineligible areas or have not updated their farm maps in regard to boundaries. In many cases these breaches date back as far as 2005. Each change has to be traced to the year it started and the impact of the change applied to payments. These assessments are processed as quickly as practical, however cases involving retrospective eligible area changes are complex and take longer to clear.

While we have met our payment targets so far, I am disappointed that problems remain in regard to the slower payment of inspection cases. I have asked my officials to review the processing system in

the current year and beyond to identify if further action can be taken to reduce delays for farmers still awaiting payment.

Single Farm Payments: Delays

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department is taking to address delays in the release of Single Farm Payments which is having a detrimental effect on the farming community.

(AQW 8841/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: A Programme of EU Audit Compliance is currently underway in the Department and this has the potential to result in a significant reduction in this processing time in future years. The most significant investment in this regard is the introduction of a new Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS), which once stabilised should significantly reduce the number of breaches found at field inspection. It is intended that LPIS maps will be issued in advance of the 2013 Single Application Form.

The introduction of control with remote sensing, which will be piloted this year, also has the potential to significantly enhance the processing of inspection cases.

Land eligibility inspections were carried out on 1,894 claims to Single Farm Payment (SFP) in 2011. Unfortunately, inspections have discovered that quite a number of claimants have claimed ineligible areas or have not updated their farm maps in regard to boundaries. In many cases these breaches date back as far as 2005. Each change has to be traced to the year it started and the impact of the change applied to payments. These assessments are processed as quickly as practical, however cases involving retrospective eligible area changes are complex and take longer to clear.

While we have met our payment targets so far, I am disappointed that problems currently remain in regard to the slower payment of inspection cases. I have asked my officials to review the processing system in the current year and beyond to identify if further action can be taken to reduce delays for farmers still awaiting payment.

Schmallenberg Virus

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions have been held with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on the spread of the Schmallenberg Virus and any possible spread to farms in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 8851/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My officials have been in regular contact with DEFRA on Schmallenberg virus. This has been through meetings and regular reports on both the Continent and in Britain.

The most recent CVO Stocktake meeting took place on 1 March 2012. This was one of a series of Stocktake Meetings which have occurred on a regular basis since the New Year. There has also been a meeting of the CVOs, Devolved Administrations. At these meetings, the implications of the spread of SBV and the research needs to increase our understanding of the epidemiology of the virus were discussed. My officials are also in contact with their counterparts in DAFM, and the Commission as further information emerges from clinical cases and research.

Ulster-Scots Culture and Heritage

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she will be promoting Ulster-Scots culture and heritage as well as the Líofo initiative at the Balmoral Show.

(AQW 8933/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As part of the commitment given to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, all public bodies here are required to encourage the use of Irish and Ulster-Scots. As a large public service provider, DARD is also expected to take some steps to raise awareness levels too. The Council of Europe Charter on Regional or Minority Languages is designed to protect and promote

regional or minority languages. At present, the Charter obligations apply to each language differently, as Part II of the Charter applies to Irish and Ulster-Scots and Part III applies only to Irish.

The Lóifa initiative will be promoted by the Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure (DCAL) at this year's Balmoral Show. Steps have now been taken to also include space for DCAL at the Balmoral Show for Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency to promote their respective heritage and cultures.

Glenariff Forest Park

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how her Department can help develop Glenariff Forest Park and its caravan park as a tourist facility.

(AQW 8954/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The forest recreation strategy acknowledges that we will have to work with partners to realise the full potential of forests to deliver against wider objectives such as health, tourism, education and sport and my officials are working with other government agencies, local authorities and other recreational providers to ensure that opportunities are realised.

Within the context of this strategy, an assessment of the existing and potential tourism development opportunities available from forests in the north of Ireland has been jointly commissioned between the NI Tourist Board and Forest Service. The purpose of the study is to gather and analyse tourism information and provide evidence-based proposals for tourism development for forests in the north of Ireland. This will inform the Forest Service planning review process and assist the NI Tourist Board and other partners to support the case for tourism development in forests. The study is required to provide specific outputs for forests in the Antrim Hills and Glens area (Moyle) and Moyle District Council are represented on the project steering group.

My officials in Forest Service have also been working in partnership with the Strategic Investment Board to explore market opportunities for investment and service delivery across the forest estate, including the provision of caravan and camping. A business case for testing commercial opportunities in renewable energy and leisure, including caravan and camping, has been completed and is currently going through the approvals process.

Rural Crime

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the meetings that she has had with the PSNI in relation to rural crime since May 2011.

(AQW 8991/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I met the Chief Constable in January to highlight the increase in rural crime, including the rise in theft from farms, and the very high level of concern it is causing within the farming community. The Chief Constable has since written to notify me of a recent intelligence led investigation which has resulted in the recovery of stolen items including a tractor, plant and tools. As a result of this investigation I understand that an individual is to appear at Court in the coming weeks charged with handling stolen goods.

I will be meeting the Chief Constable again shortly to discuss how we can work together to tackle rural crime including raising awareness of measures which farmers can take to reduce incidences of rural crime. I also want to explore with him how DARD Direct Offices can be used to disseminate information on rural crime prevention to rural dwellers.

My Department's Veterinary Service Enforcement Branch has also been working closely with the PSNI in dealing with rural crime including carrying out joint on farm inspections, training some members of the PSNI in areas of livestock movement and identification and establishing 24/7 communication channels.

Loífa 2015: Spend

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much her Department has spent to date on promoting the Loífa initiative; and how much she has allocated to be spent on the initiative.

(AQW 9005/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As yet no direct funding has been provided, or allocated by DARD in support of the Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure (DCAL) Loífa initiative and any future spend in promoting the initiative, is likely to involve staff costs in my Equality Unit.

DARD Headquarters: Relocation

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department has submitted a business case on the proposed move to new departmental headquarters to the Department of Finance and Personnel; and if not, to outline the timescale for the submission.

(AQW 9022/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The HQ relocation project is subject to the NI Executives appraisal and business case processes and therefore follows the NI Guide to Expenditure Appraisal and Evaluation (NIGEAE). The first stage of that process is the approval of a Strategic Outline Case. DFP approved the Strategic Outline Case for this project on 01 December 2011. Preparatory work is currently underway for the development of the Outline and Full Business Case. I expect the business case process to be completed by 31 March 2013.

Líofa 2015: Spend

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to provide an estimate of the cost of the three proposed Líofa initiative launches happening outside Belfast and Londonderry.

(AQW 9074/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The three proposed Líofa initiative launches outside Belfast and Derry will likely take place at DARD Direct locations and will involve my Equality Branch staff. At present it is not possible to estimate these costs.

DARD Staff: Disciplinary Action

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of staff disciplinary actions taken by her Department in each of the last two years, at Staff Officer level and above, including details of the offence and the disciplinary sanctions applied.

(AQW 9128/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has taken disciplinary action against two officers at Staff Officer grade or above in the period January to December 2010 and two staff at Staff Officer grade or above in the period January to December 2011. Details of the offences and sanctions imposed are set out in the attached table.

JANUARY 2010- DECEMBER 2011

Grade	Offence	Sanction
Inspector Grade 111	Bringing the Department into disrepute which was a breach of the Standards of Conduct policy	Downgrading and disciplinary transfer
Inspector Grade 11	Inappropriate behaviour which was in breach of Standards of Conduct policy	Dismissed

JANUARY 2011 – DECEMBER 2012

Grade	Offence	Sanction
Higher Professional & Technical Officer	Bringing the Department into disrepute which was a breach of the Standards of Conduct policy	Formal warning and financial penalty
Staff Officer	Inappropriate behaviour that was in breach of the Dignity at Work policy	Disciplinary transfer and financial penalty

Líofa 2015: Uptake

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many staff have signed up to the Líofa initiative; and whether she plans to launch similar initiatives on the cultural heritage of Ulster Scots.

(AQW 9137/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Currently we have not yet assessed the amount DARD staff who have signed up to the Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure (DCAL) Líofa initiative.

We are currently sourcing the delivery of Ulster-Scots language classes and it has been agreed that in 2012/2013 DARD will explore with the Ulster Scots Agency about the possibility of providing lunchtime classes. DARD has in the meantime obtained a selection of books and dictionaries on Ulster-Scots these are available for staff to borrow from the Department's Learning Resource Centre.

Dog Collars: Electric Shock Capability

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether will introduce measures to regulate or ban the use of dog collars which emit an electric shock.

(AQW 9177/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My animal welfare priorities are the roll-out of the provisions in the Welfare of Animals Act 2011, including new subordinate legislation on the welfare of farmed animals, dog breeding establishments and the tail docking of dogs.

I have no plans at present to introduce a ban on electronic collar training devices. However, the Welfare of Animals Act 2011 includes the power to make subordinate legislation to secure the welfare of animals. This provision could provide the power to ban shock collars in future if the evidence shows that it is necessary.

I am aware that Defra commissioned research in 2007 into the use of shock collars. The results of this research are currently being peer reviewed and it is anticipated that the findings will be published later this year. When the outcome of that research is available I will consider if subordinate legislation, if any, may be required to secure the welfare of animals. Any such legislation would be subject to public consultation, scrutiny by the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee and approval by affirmative resolution of the Assembly.

Job Advert: Irish

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why her Department recently advertised a job vacancy entirely in Irish with no English translation.

(AQW 9191/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The advertisement in question was to seek applications for the Agri-Food Strategy Board. An English language version of this advert was also published in the Belfast Telegraph, the Irish News and the Newsletter.

Ulster-Scots Culture and Heritage

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she plans to promote Ulster-Scots culture and heritage through the DARD Direct offices in a similar way to the Lófa initiative. (AQW 9197/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Discussion is taking place with the Ulster-Scots Agency on the provision of awareness and promotional material to be displayed through the DARD Direct Offices.

It has also been agreed that in 2012/2013 DARD will explore with the Ulster Scots Agency about the possibility of providing lunchtime classes based on the same format as the Irish Language pilot. DARD has in the meantime obtained a selection of books and dictionaries on Ulster-Scots and these are available for staff to borrow from the Department's Learning Resource Centre.

Job Advert: Irish

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why an advert placed by her Department in the Sunday Life on 4 March 2012 appeared exclusively in Irish. (AQW 9214/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The advertisement in question was to seek applications for the Agri-Food Strategy Board. An English language version of this advert was also published in the Sunday Life on the same day, as well as in the Belfast Telegraph, the Newsletter and the Irish News on preceding days.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Sports Events: Ministerial Attendance

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many (i) association football; (ii) rugby union; (iii) Gaelic; and (iv) cricket matches she has attended since May 2011. (AQW 8371/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Since taking office in May 2011 I have received official invitations and have attended as Minister (i) 3 Soccer matches; (ii) 1 Rugby Union match; (iii) No Football matches, no Hurling matches, 1 Camogie match; and (iv) I was scheduled to attend 1 Cricket match, however this was called off due to poor weather conditions. I have also attended a variety of sporting events in a personal capacity.

Inland Fisheries: Staffing

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the (i) number; (ii) job title; and (iii) grade of staff employed in Inland Fisheries. (AQW 8700/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In answer to your questions please see the summary table below.

Inland Fisheries Staff		
Analogous Grade	Full Grade Name/Title	No of Staff in Post
Grade 7	Chief Fisheries Officer	1
	Principal	1
Grade 7 Total		2
Deputy Principal	Deputy Chief Fisheries Officer	1
	Deputy Principal	2

Inland Fisheries Staff		
Analogous Grade	Full Grade Name/Title	No of Staff in Post
Deputy Principal Total		3
Staff Officer	Senior Fisheries Officer	5
	Staff Officer	3
Staff Officer Total		8
Executive Officer 1	Executive Officer I	4
	Fisheries Officer 1	6
	Inspector Group 2	8
Executive Officer 1 Total		18
Executive Officer 2	Executive Officer II	1
	Fisheries Officer 2	3
Executive Officer 2 Total		4
Administrative Officer	Administrative Officer	11
Administrative Officer Total		11
Administrative Assistant	Administrative Assistant	2
	Casual Administrative Assistant	1
Administrative Assistant Total		3
Industrial	Chargehand/Spec Grade C	16
	Senior Supervisor - Grade A	2
	Skilled Grade D	1
	Supervisor - Grade B	4
Industrial Total		23
Grand Total		72

Brandywell Stadium, Derry: Upgrade

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding her Department has allocated for the upgrade of Brandywell Stadium, Derry.

(AQW 8730/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI is responsible for the distribution of funding for sport in the north of Ireland. Sport NI has not allocated any exchequer funding for the upgrade of the Brandywell Stadium, Derry in the current CSR period.

Cultural Tourism Potential: South Down

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how her Department intends to promote existing cultural tourism potential in the South Down constituency, particularly the history of the 1798 rebellion.

(AQW 8732/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department of Culture, Arts plays a central role in cultural tourism in the north of Ireland and will invest £158.24m capital and £431.19m current funding in the culture, arts and leisure sector over the 4 years of the current CSR Period 2011-2015.

The Department invests in the cultural infrastructure that is essential to attract visitors in the first instance and central to a positive visitor experience once they get here, e.g. museums, theatres, sports venues and visitor attractions, and also invests significant revenue funding to ensure that there is an attractive arts and cultural programme on offer for visitors. That investment helps to differentiate the north of Ireland from competing locations as a 'destination of choice' for potential visitors.

The profile and beauty of South Down has been considerably raised on the global stage recently with the help of the Oscar win by 'The Shore', filmed in Killough and other major productions such as Hollywood Box Office's (HBO's) Game of Thrones where parts of Series 1 were filmed in Tollymore Forest and Castleward.

Foras na Gaeilge funds a number of projects in South Down that help to promote the Irish language in the constituency, which contributes to the development of the cultural tourism product in that regard.

The Department is not aware of any specific plans in relation to the 1798 Rebellion in any of the council areas in the South Down Constituency, however I would wish to draw your attention to the fact that the Ulster Museum contains various objects relating to the 1798 Rebellion and has made a long-term loan of a Newry Yeomanry belt plate and button to the Newry and Mourne Museum. National Museums would also be pleased to explore further loan possibilities to museums and other appropriate venues in the South Down constituency in support of their efforts to promote cultural tourism potential in the area.

Sport Matters

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what progress has been made against the following targets (i) that every student teacher at primary level should undertake physical literacy training to support their teaching of physical education; (ii) the creation of a rolling programme of physical literacy training for all primary school teachers; (iii) the establishment of at least 20 School Club Partnerships; (iv) the creation of 100 multi-skills clubs and the deployment of 400 multi-skills coaches; and (v) the creation of an annual programme of continuous professional development for 4,500 coaches, as set out in the Sport Matters Strategy.

(AQW 8737/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport Matters seeks to identify what success might look like should its 26 high level targets be fully achieved over the life of the strategy. In the case of Participation (Physical Literacy) Sport Matters additionally lists 5 key requirements that would allow its stated vision of a child's experience of sport and physical recreation to be realised. I am aware from the Department of Education (DE) and SportNI of the following elements of progress within their areas of responsibility in fulfilling these particular success requirements:-

- i) The Higher Education Institutions have confirmed to the Department of Education (DE) that every student teacher at primary level undertakes physical literacy training to support their teaching of physical education.
- ii) DE is funding the Curriculum Sports Programme for primary schools the aim of which is to develop the generic physical literacy skills of the youngest pupils through participation in enjoyable sports. Sports coaches delivering the programme work closely with primary school teachers to raise their confidence and provide support in their delivery of physical education.
- iii) Information is not currently available on the number of school club partnerships that have been established since the launch of Sport Matters.

SportNI, however, is currently seeking to encourage clubs to develop partnerships with schools as part of its Clubmark NI programme. SportNI estimates that approximately 200 clubs are currently taking part in this programme.

- iv) The most recently available data from SportNI suggests that there are currently 50 multi-skills clubs operating across the north and approximately 60 multi-skills coaches currently deployed through the network of Activ8Wildcats clubs.
- v) SportNI has delivered an annual programme of continuous professional development opportunities to an average of 1,525 coaches per year since 2009.

Angling Licences: Granted to Visitors

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number of visiting anglers from overseas in each of the last twelve years.

(AQW 8768/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department has only recorded information from 2009 onwards. Prior to 2009 the Fisheries Conservancy Board had responsibility for angling licences. I have detailed below the records held by the former Fisheries Conservancy Board on angling licences issued to visiting anglers (those with addresses outside the north of Ireland).

Years	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
No. of Licences Issued	4978	3599	3489	3532	3498	3511

Years	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
No. of Licences Issued	3187	3160	3253	2884	2844	2811

Angling Licences: Attracting Visitors

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of the impact that having such a large number of angling licences across the island of Ireland has on attracting visiting anglers,

(AQW 8769/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There are three bodies across the island of Ireland which provide fishing licenses for their jurisdictions, namely DCAL, the Loughs Agency and Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI). The licensing regimes are all different reflecting the priorities in each jurisdiction. For example, in the IFI area anglers are only required to purchase a licence to fish for salmon and sea trout.

While the overall situation may appear complex to visiting anglers, there would appear to be little impact on the sale of DCAL angling licences to anglers visiting the DCAL jurisdiction, as numbers sold between 2005 and 2010 have largely remained steady.

Rugby World Cup 2023

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what role she intends to play in supporting any potential bid by the Irish Rugby Football Union to host the 2023 Rugby World Cup.

(AQW 8786/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Pursuant to my answer to AQW 5711/11-15, under Sports Matters Government is committed to establishing the north of Ireland as a world class venue for sporting events. Should the Irish Rugby Football Union decide to bid to host the 2023 Rugby World Cup they would enjoy my full support in making the case to my ministerial colleague in DETI who has responsibility for events.

Trade Union: Secondment

Mr McCallister asked Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) the number of (a) full-time; and (b) part-time staff who are currently on secondment from her Department, or its arm's length bodies,

to each recognised trade union; (ii) the salary scale for each secondee; and (iii) the length of each secondment to date.

(AQW 8856/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín:

Number of staff on secondment	Salary scale for each employee	Length of secondment to date
a) full-time - 2	£18,038-£22,180 £17,161-£21,519	2 years 4 months
b) part-time - 0	-	-

Oscars Success: 'The Shore'

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans her Department has to recognise the achievement of 'The Shore' in winning an Oscar for Best Live Action Short.

(AQW 8905/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am very proud that a film that was funded by NI Screen, filmed in the North of Ireland and written, produced and directed by someone from this country has achieved such an accolade.

I understand that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is hosting a reception to pay tribute to the Oscar success on Thursday 8 March 2012 and I am fully supportive of this well deserved recognition.

Oscars Success: 'The Shore'

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans her Department has to build on the Oscar success of 'The Shore'.

(AQW 8907/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Terry and Oorlagh George's Oscar for 'The Shore' is a significant boost for screen industries in the North of Ireland. 'The Shore' was supported by NI Screen using Lottery funds provided through the Arts Council of NI. The publicity surrounding the Oscar for The Shore will assist the ongoing good work being undertaken by both NI Screen and the production community in general to grow the creative industries here.

Creative Industries: Promotion in Hollywood

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what presence her Department had in Hollywood, USA to maximise the opportunity to promote the Creative Industries during the Oscars weekend.

(AQW 8912/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: NI Screen, using funds provided by DCAL, supported a promotional campaign in support of 'The Shore'. As has been very clear from the local and international coverage of The Shore's Oscar success, promotion of the skills base and talent available in the North of Ireland was one of the key messages within that promotional campaign. We are grateful to both Terry and Oorlagh George for ensuring that the talent of the actors and crew in the North of Ireland was so prominent within their story.

Creative Industries: Promotional Campaign

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what specific activity was undertaken by her Department to promote awareness of the Creative Industries sector in Northern Ireland, between the announcement that the short film 'The Shore' had been nominated for an Oscar, and the awarding of the Oscar.

(AQW 8918/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: DCAL provided £15,000 to support a promotional campaign that celebrated 'The Shore' and its Oscar nomination. This support was critical to the enormous coverage that was given to 'The Shore' by US quality news outlets. Key amongst the messages in this promotional campaign was the talent of the actors and production crew in the North of Ireland.

Fishing: Riparian Owners/Leaseholders

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in order to allow her Department to produce a register of riparian owners or lease holders, whether she would consider introducing a policy to require all parties who claim ownership or fishing rights on rivers or waterways, to produce proof; and to make this register available to the public.

(AQW 8959/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Departments priority at this time is to establish a fully documented register of ownership for the DCAL Public Angling Estate waters.

A register of private riparian owners or leaseholders of fishing rights to private rivers or waterways will take considerable time and resources to compile and maintain and could only be considered when the above work has been carried out and subject to required resources being available at that time.

Anyone seeking information on fishing rights can consult with Land & Property Services, which is the responsible Agency for maintaining registries of title to property and land, including sporting and fishing rights, in the north of Ireland.

Sport: Participation

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) what progress his Department has made in halting the decline in the rate of participation in sport and physical recreation; and (ii) the current rates of participation in sport and physical recreation, broken down by (a) gender; and (b) age.

(AQW 8964/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in partnership, with

Sport NI, has developed and is implementing a 10 year strategy for sport and physical recreation entitled, Sport Matters. The decline in the rate of participation in sport and physical recreation is identified as a key issue to be addressed over the life of Sport Matters. Sport Matters also contains a specific target to have stopped the decline in adult participation in sport and physical recreation by 2013. The latest DCAL published participation figures indicate that approximately 50% of the population are currently participating in sport and physical activity. This compares with 46% for the previous year and 45% in the year prior to Sport Matters approval by the Executive. The latest published figures also indicate that 57% of males and 44% of females are currently participating in sport. The table below sets out the latest published information on sports participation broken down by age:-

Age of participant	Aged 16-24	Aged 25-34	Aged 35-44	Aged 45-54	Aged 55-64	Aged 65+
% of respondents participating	73	70	62	49	41	23

Líofa 2015: Costs

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for a breakdown of the total cost to date of the Líofa initiative; and for an estimate of the total cost of the initiative through to 2015.

(AQW 9035/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The breakdown of cost for the Líofa 2015 initiative launch is as follows:-

	Interpreters	Website	Banners	Hospitality	Promotional material	Total
Cost	£251.90	£1217.16	£ 178.00	£ 694.80	£1500.00	£3841.86

I am in the process of appointing a Líofa Development Officer who will be in post for a period of one year however, this may be extended for a further year subject to the agreement of all parties. The salary scale will be £27,115 to £30,520 and will be paid by DCAL.

I will be allocating further funds to the Líofa 2015 project as appropriate.

Safety of Sports Grounds: Funding

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the funding that has been allocated to the 30 sports stadia under the Safety of Designated Sports Grounds Scheme in each of the last ten years. [R]

(AQW 9056/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI is responsible for the distribution of funding to sport in the north of Ireland. Over the last ten financial years, Sport NI has provided £16,431,216 to those sports grounds designated under the Safety of Sports Grounds (NI) Order 2006. A breakdown of this figure is provided in the table overleaf. In addition to this, the Ulster Council GAA received funding during the period 2005-2008 totalling £2,447,668 towards a modernisation programme that included refurbishment works to the main county grounds.

Occupier of ground	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	Totals
Antrim GAA	39,650	65,650					565,773				671,073
Armagh GAA	100,000	140,000					830,693		808,000		1,878,693
Ballyclare Comrades FC									232,000	59,652	291,652
Ballymena United FC		20,000				161,636			1,025,035	12,940	1,219,611
Ballymoney United FC										58,972	58,972
Carrick Rangers FC										52,760	52,760
Clan na Gael GAC											0
Cliftonville FC					800,000			300,000			1,100,000
Coleraine FC		70,000								67,067	137,067
Crossmaglen GAC											0
Crusaders FC		77,450							440,706	704,070	1,222,226
Derry City FC	9,724										9,724
Derry GAA	15,000						800,000			6,998	821,998
Donegal Celtic FC								824,133		48,954	873,087
Down GAA	15,000					800,000			808,000		1,623,000

Occupier of ground	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	Totals
Downpatrick GAC	60,000									59,436	119,436
Dungannon GAC									226,675	47,111	273,786
Fermanagh GAA	50,000	65,000				405,123				28,624	548,747
Glenavon FC		70,000							347,000	24,404	441,404
Glentoran FC	50,597									59,350	109,947
Larne FC										53,200	53,200
Linfield FC		85,000								215,462	300,462
Loughgiel Shamrocks GAC										61,114	61,114
Newry City FC	27,000								231,500	58,687	317,187
Owenbeg Centre of Excellence											0
Portadown FC	245,256	65,000					800,000		314,495	48,780	1,473,531
St John's GAC										56,998	56,998
Irvinestown GAC										28,515	28,515
Tyrone GAA	40,000	140,000				613,770					793,770
Ulster Rugby	230,991	90,000			328,437			1,215,000		28,828	1,893,256
											16,431,216

Occupier of ground	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	Totals
Antrim GAA	39,650	65,650					565,773				671,073
Armagh GAA	100,000	140,000					830,693		808,000		1,878,693
Ballyclare Comrades FC									232,000	59,652	291,652
Ballymena United FC		20,000				161,636			1,025,035	12,940	1,219,611
Ballymoney United FC										58,972	58,972
Carrick Rangers FC										52,760	52,760
Clan na Gael GAC											0
Cliftonville FC					800,000			300,000			1,100,000
Coleraine FC		70,000								67,067	137,067
Crossmaglen GAC											0
Crusaders FC		77,450							440,706	704,070	1,222,226
Derry City FC	9,724										9,724
Derry GAA	15,000						800,000			6,998	821,998
Donegal Celtic FC								824,133		48,954	873,087
Down GAA	15,000					800,000			808,000		1,623,000

Occupier of ground	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	Totals
Downpatrick GAC	60,000									59,436	119,436
Dungannon GAC									226,675	47,111	273,786
Fermanagh GAA	50,000	65,000				405,123				28,624	548,747
Glenavon FC		70,000							347,000	24,404	441,404
Glentoran FC	50,597									59,350	109,947
Larne FC										53,200	53,200
Linfield FC		85,000								215,462	300,462
Loughgiel Shamrocks GAC										61,114	61,114
Newry City FC	27,000								231,500	58,687	317,187
Owenbeg Centre of Excellence											0
Portadown FC	245,256	65,000					800,000		314,495	48,780	1,473,531
St John's GAC										56,998	56,998
Irvinestown GAC										28,515	28,515
Tyrone GAA	40,000	140,000				613,770					793,770
Ulster Rugby	230,991	90,000			328,437			1,215,000		28,828	1,893,256
											16,431,216

Oscars Success: 'The Shore'

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans her Department has to build on the Oscar success of 'The Shore'.

(AQW 9059/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Terry and Oorlagh George's Oscar for 'The Shore' is a significant boost for screen industries in the North of Ireland. 'The Shore' was supported by NI Screen using Lottery funds provided through the Arts Council of NI. The publicity surrounding the Oscar for The Shore will assist the ongoing good work being undertaken by both NI Screen and the production community in general to grow the creative industries here.

Quoile Barrier: Fish Pass

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) what action her Department has taken to repair the fish pass at the Quoile Barrier on the Quoile River; (ii) to outline any future action her Department intends to take on this matter; and (iii) what action the Department will take to safely remove the seals which have entered the Quoile River as a result of damage to the fish pass and are depleting the river's fish stocks.

(AQW 9060/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín:

- (i) DCAL officials have requested the Rivers Agency, as owner of the Quoile Barrier, to undertake a survey and if necessary carry out remedial work.
- (ii) DCAL Inland Fisheries staff will continue to liaise with the Rivers Agency and will keep this matter under regular review.
- (iii) Seals are protected species under the Wildlife Order and the Quoile area is a designated Nature Reserve managed by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). DCAL can take no action in relation to seals without the approval of NIEA and the Department does not have the specialist knowledge and equipment to safely remove the seals.

European Heritage Status

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she will consult with the UK Government in relation to Europe's cultural heritage before any future decisions are taken, such as, on the European Heritage Label.

(AQW 9104/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I would welcome any opportunity for the North of Ireland to have its cultural sites such as the Pilgrim Route in Fermanagh, Gracehill, the Navan Centre, and Derry, to name just a few, to have the opportunity to be considered for European Heritage status. The importance of some of these such as Gracehill (a Moravion settlement) and the Navan Centre (a Kingly site of Ireland) becomes magnified when considered in a transnational context.

My officials continue to liaise with colleagues in DCMS to ensure that I am kept apprised of European policy developments.

Fishing: Net Licences for Lough Neagh

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many licences for fishing with nets in Lough Neagh her Department has issued in 2012; and for her assessment of the impact this might have on the salmon population in the 2012 season.

(AQW 9262/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The table below details the number of licences for fishing with nets on Lough Neagh issued by my Department up to 7 March 2012:

Type of net licence	Number issued
Draft net for the capture of salmon and freshwater fish on Lough Neagh	9
Single wall set net or trammel net for the capture of trout in Lough Neagh	41
Single wall set net for the taking of freshwater fish other than Trout or rainbow trout (coarse)	98
Bait net (must be used in conjunction with a long line for eels)	4

Salmon can only be legally taken on Lough Neagh with a draft net and these are mainly used to target pollan. DCAL Fisheries Protection Officers very rarely detect salmon in wall or trammel nets that they inspect.

Carcass tag returns would indicate that very few salmon are taken by draft net licence holders. A total of 9 salmon were taken in 2010 and the total for 2011 was 36 salmon.

All 2012 draft net licence holders have been sent a letter by the Department asking that they voluntarily do not fish for salmon in 2012 and where possible return any salmon caught to the water unharmed.

The main threat to salmon in Lough Neagh comes from illegal nets placed close to the mouths of rivers that the fish move into to spawn. Fisheries Protection Officers are alert to this and will respond appropriately.

Department of Education

Postage and Printing Costs

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education whether his Department, and its arm's-length bodies, give elected representatives the choice of receiving reports and all other correspondence by email to minimise postage and printing costs.

(AQW 8423/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): As far as is practicable, my Department and its Arms Length Bodies use electronic means of communication, including corresponding and sending reports by e-mail and making documents available on-line.

While adhering to Assembly guidance on the provision of information to MLAs, my Department, where possible, meets individual requests from MLAs for receipt of Assembly Statements, answers to Assembly Questions and other documents by e-mail only.

Job Losses: Education Sector

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education, in light of the Labour Market Profile: Northern Workforce Development Forum report, why the Northern area has been particularly hit by job losses in the Education Sector.

(AQW 8488/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I note the figures which are the cause of concern relate to a census of employment in 2007 undertaken by the Department for Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

The drop in recorded employee jobs in the Education Sector between September 2005 and September 2007 for the Northern area (Table 3 in the report) is due to a change in the way any person with more than one job with the same employer was recorded in the Education Sector within this area. Prior to 2007 a person with more than 1 job with the same employer was counted more than once. This data

quality issue was addressed for this area in the 2007 Census and a person with more than one job with the same employer should no longer be counted more than once.

Table 1 provides comparison data for September 2005, September 2007 and September 2009. This shows that the number of the jobs within the Education Sector in the Northern area was stable between 2007 and 2009.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF EMPLOYEE JOBS WITHIN THE EDUCATION SECTOR IN THE NORTHERN AREA, SEPTEMBER 2005, 2007 AND 2009

Sector SIC03¹	2005	2007	2009
Education	17,807	15,420	15,399

Source: Census of Employment

1 The 2003 Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) has been used to improve comparability over time.

Classroom Assistants: Funding

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education whether he can guarantee that, following the changes to how classroom assistants are funded (i) the provision of classroom assistants will remain a universal service (ii) these changes will not result in a reduction in the provision of classroom assistants; and (iii) no school will be left without the support of classroom assistants.

(AQW 8489/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department has not made any changes to the way Classroom Assistants are funded.

Jolly Tots Playgroup, Mayobridge

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Education what steps he intends to take to ensure that the Jolly Tots Pre-School Playgroup, Mayobridge, is sustained and that morning and afternoon sessions are available on a Monday to Friday basis during term-time.

(AQW 8536/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Jolly Tots Playgroup is in the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme this year. For 2012/ 2013 they will be allocated places by the SELB according to the number required to meet demand in the area.

I have recently approved a Development Proposal for a new twenty-six place part-time nursery unit at St. Patrick's Primary School in Mayobridge. This approval is subject to the school ceasing to admit children to its reception class. This decision was made to meet a need for additional provision in the wider area.

Jolly Tots Playgroup, Mayobridge

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Education what resources will be allocated to Jolly Tots Pre-School Playgroup, Mayobridge, to ensure that it is sustained and maintained for the young families in the area.

(AQW 8537/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Jolly Tots Playgroup is in the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme this year. For 2012/ 2013 they will be allocated places by the SELB according to the number required to meet demand in the area.

I have recently approved a Development Proposal for a new twenty-six place part-time nursery unit at St. Patrick's Primary School in Mayobridge. This approval is subject to the school ceasing to admit children to its reception class. This decision was made to meet a need for additional provision in the wider area.

Schools: Energy Efficiency

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to outline his Department's policy in relation to energy efficiency in schools.

(AQW 8552/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There are two major elements that impact on energy efficiency in schools: management of the physical infrastructure; and influencing the behaviours of pupils and teachers.

All major works in schools must include measures to achieve a Building Research Establishment Environment Assessment Method (BREEAM) rating, an internationally recognisable standard used to assess the environmental performance of buildings. All major projects are required to achieve a BREEAM rating of 'excellent' for new schemes, or 'very good' for refurbishment schemes. All contracts include overarching requirements in respect of energy, water and low carbon design. My Department also continues to review and revise its school design handbook to ensure it incorporates appropriate guidance on sustainable and energy efficient design. Consideration is given to the use of renewable energy sources and where appropriate, these are employed for school heating (typically biomass boilers and occasionally photovoltaic solar panels).

My Department and the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) support schools in meeting their responsibilities under the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive. This legislation currently requires that all publicly occupied buildings have a Display Energy Certificate and an associated advisory report.

Carbon emissions from the schools' estate are monitored and reported on annually as part of the Carbon Reduction Commitment Energy Efficiency Scheme. This scheme is designed to encourage participants to reduce their carbon footprint by reducing energy consumption. An annual energy return is also provided to the Public Sector Energy Campaign. This campaign, managed by DFP, assesses the performance of the public sector in the drive to improve energy efficiency and reduce carbon consumption in line with agreed targets.

My Department seeks to develop young people as contributors to the environment and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is now included in the curriculum for all key stages. Through ESD, pupils explore issues such as exercising environmental responsibility through the conservation of resources (including energy), waste-management and the promotion of local biodiversity. Schools are also encouraged to integrate sustainable development into their School Development Plans.

The ELB energy officers actively promote energy efficiency and offer advice and support to all schools within their respective Board areas. The ELBs also work with councils to support 'Eco Schools' (administered by TIDY NI) by facilitating seminars, providing assessors and offering training for teachers.

Schools: Energy Efficiency

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what work his Department is currently carrying out in relation to energy efficiency in schools.

(AQW 8554/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Energy efficiency in schools is largely managed by the four Energy and Environment Officers and five Environment Support Officers in the Education and Library Boards (ELBs). The ELBs' Energy and Environment Sections actively promote energy efficiency and offer advice and support including a programme of advisory visits to schools within their Board areas. The ELBs work with councils to support the Eco-Schools programme (administered by TIDY NI) by facilitating seminars, providing assessors and offering training for teachers.

Carbon emissions from the schools' estate are monitored and reported on annually as part of the Carbon Reduction Commitment Energy Efficiency Scheme. School electricity metering equipment is being upgraded to aid identification of energy waste as part of the ELBs' energy efficiency monitoring and targeting programme. In addition, electricity sub meters are being installed in mobile classrooms to comply with the Energy of Performance of Buildings Directive which requires all publicly occupied buildings to have a Display Energy Certificate and an associated advisory report.

The ELBs have continued to upgrade buildings and their associated mechanical and electrical infrastructure to improve energy efficiency. Energy conservation projects for this financial year (2011/12) include:

- Installation of BMS (Building Management Systems)
- Upgrading windows
- Installation of roofspace insulation
- Installation of energy efficient lighting
- Boiler servicing
- Installation of biomass boilers
- Oil to gas conversion projects

My Department continues to encourage schools to implement sustainable development into their School Development Plans. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) has been fully integrated into all grant aided schools for all key stages and includes exercising environmental responsibility through the conservation of resources.

Classroom Assistants: Funding

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education, in light of the changes to the funding for classroom assistants, to detail (i) how the resources will be reallocated to schools; and (ii) whether schools, with a disproportionately high number of children with special needs, will receive the resources to employ a sufficient number of classroom assistants.

(AQW 8557/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department has not made any changes to the way Classroom Assistants are funded.

Teachers: Redundancy or Early Retirement Packages

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Education how many teachers who have received redundancy or early retirement packages have been re-employed to carry out substitution or cover work in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8580/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is as follows:

Financial year	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Number of teachers who have received enhanced compensation for redundancy or premature retirement benefits and have been re-employed in a substitute or temporary capacity	1731	1616	1409

The above figures exclude teachers whose redundancy compensation was not paid through the Department's payroll.

Schools: Ministerial Invitations

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to detail the school visit invitations he has received since his appointment, broken down by sector.

(AQW 8657/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Please see attached list of schools, broken down by sector that I have received an invitation to visit since my appointment as Education Minister.

Nursery - Controlled	
311 6177	Magherafelt Nursery School, Magherafelt
Nursery - Roman Catholic Maintained	
513 6607	College Farm Nursery, Armagh
Primary - Controlled	
201 0380	Model Primary School, Derry
201 2510	Barrack St Boys' Primary School, Belfast
301 2264	Millburn Primary Sschool, Coleraine
401 1631	Hollywood Primary School, Hollywood
401 1647	Ballykeigle Primary School, Comber
401 1688	Redburn Primary School, Hollywood
501 6117	Ballyoran Primary School, Portadown
501 6138	Bocombra Primary School, Portadown
501-1127	Carrick Primary School, Burren
Primary - Roman Catholic Maintained	
103-0327	Holy Rosary Primary School, Belfast
103-6576	Holy Child Primary School, Belfast
103-6623	Holy Trinity Primary School, Belfast
103-6589	St Teresa's Primary School, Belfast
103-6602	St Oliver Plunkett Primary School, Belfast
203 2676	St Patrick's Primary School, Gortin
203 6069	St Anne's Primary School, Derry
203 6458	St Mary's Gortnaghey Primary School, Dungiven
203 6632	Holy Trinity Primary School, Enniskillen
203-1869	St Mary's Primary School, Newtownbutler
203-2294	St Mary's Primary School, Attinure
203-6096	St Mary's Girls' Primary School, Strabane
303 3313	St Bernard's Primary School, Glengormley
303 6103	St Brigid's Primary School, Magherafelt
303-2387	St Francis Primary School, Derrylatinee
403 1663	St Joseph's Primary School, Newcastle
403 6081	St Luke's Primary School, Belfast
403 6182	St Colmcille's Primary School, Downpatrick
403-1671	St Patrick's Primary School, Castlewellan
403-3028	St Patrick's Primary School, Portaferry

Primary - Roman Catholic Maintained	
403-3036	St Mary's Primary School, Killyleagh
403-6113	St Nicholas Primary School, Ardglass
503 1108	Clea Primary School, Keady
503 1138	St Joseph's Primary School, Armagh
503 1213	St Clare's Convent Primary School, Newry
503 2715	St John's Primary School, Moy
503 6590	Primate Dixon Primary School, Coalisland
503 6633	St Francis Primary School, Lurgan
503 6673	St Bronagh's Primary School, Rostrevor
503-0975	St Malachy's Primary School, Armagh
503-1148	St Patrick's Primary School, Crossmaglen
503-1160	St Teresa's Primary School, Lurgan
503-1172	St Mary's Primary School, Granemore
503-2591	Roan St Patrick's Primary School, Eglisli
503-2692	St Mary's Primary School, Stewartstown
503 1103	Tannaghmore Primary School, Lurgan, Craigavon
Primary - other maintained	
104 6596	Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin, Belfast
204 6638	Gaelscoil ui Dhochartaigh, Strabane
204-6669	Bunscoil an Traonaigh, Lisnaskea
204-6677	Gaelscoil na gCrann, Omagh
304 6678	Gaelscoil na Speíríní, Draperstown
304 6685	Naiscoil Éanna, Glengormley
404 6648	Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche, Castlewellan
Primary - Controlled Integrated	
105 6535	Forge Integrated Primary School, Belfast
405 1680	Bangor Central Integrated Primary School, Bangor
405 6541	All Children Integrated Primary School, Newcastle
Primary - Grant Maintained Integrated	
206 6552	Omagh Integrated Primary School, Omagh
306 6652	Maine Integrated Primary School, Randalstown
406 6668	Drumlins Integrated Primary School, Ballynahinch
Secondary - Roman Catholic Maintained	
123 0053	St Louise's Comprehensive, Belfast

Secondary - Roman Catholic Maintained	
123 0155	St Genevieve's High School, Belfast
123 0173	St Gemma's High School, Belfast
123 0182	De La Salle College, Belfast
123 0262	Corpus Christi College, Belfast
123 0275	St Joseph's College, Belfast
123-0026	St Patrick's College, Belfast
223 0077	St Mary's, Limavady
223 0298	Sacred Heart College, Omagh
223-0085	St Mary's High School, Belleek, Enniskillen
323 0132	St Colm's High School, Draperstown
323-0310	St Killian's College, Garron Tower
423 0107	St Columbanus' College, Bangor
423 0223	St Colm's High School, Dunmurry
523 0088	St Paul's Junior High School, Craigavon
523 0108	St Mary's High School, Newry
523 0135	St Mark's High School, Warrenpoint
523 0160	St Brigid's High School, Armagh
523 0213	Lismore Comprehensive, Craigavon
523 0256	Drumcree College, Portadown
523-0076	St Patrick's College, Banbridge
523-0160	St Brigid's High School, Armagh
523-0192	St Joseph's College, Coalisland
523-0293	St Patrick's College, Dungannon
Secondary (Grammar) - Controlled	
141 0270	Wellington College, Belfast
341 0008	Ballyclare High School, Ballyclare
Secondary (Grammar) - Voluntary	
142 0022	Methodist College, Belfast
142 0029	St Dominic's, Belfast
142-0082	St Rose's High School Dominican College, Belfast
242 0229	Foyle College, Derry
342 0077	Belfast High School, Belfast
442 0259	Our Lady and St Patrick's College, Belfast
542 0056	St Michael's Grammar School, Lurgan

Secondary (Grammar) - Voluntary	
542-0268	St Patrick's Grammar School
Secondary - Controlled	
321-0091	Carrickfergus College, Carrickfergus
Secondary - Controlled Integrated	
425 0024	Priory College, Holywood
525 0216	Brownlow Integrated College, Craigavon
Secondary - Grant Maintained Integrated	
426 0255	Lagan College, Belfast
Secondary (Grammar) - Controlled	
441 0063	Regent House, Newtownards
441 0085	Down High School, Downpatrick
Special School - Controlled	
131 0016	Mitchell House School, Belfast
131 6582	Oakwood School and Assessment Centre, Belfast
331 6676	Castle Tower Special School, Ballymena
531 6521	Ceara Special School, Lurgan
531 6523	Sperrinview Special School, Dungannon
Special School - Maintained	
133 6548	St Gerard's Education Centre, Belfast

Schools: Asbestos

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the current system for identifying asbestos in schools and removing it; and (ii) the number of schools that have been (a) identified as having asbestos; and (b) have had asbestos removed, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8739/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

- (i) The Department is acutely aware of the risk to the health of staff and pupils of education establishments posed by asbestos. Following the introduction of the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations (NI) 2003 and the Control of Asbestos (NI Order) 2007, there is a duty placed on the education sectors to ensure that asbestos is managed effectively.

To identify the presence of asbestos in the schools' estate, the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) arrange for asbestos surveys to be carried out. Should any high risk areas be identified then arrangements for removal are made. Where it is not considered necessary to remove the asbestos immediately, the ELBs have developed plans for managing the asbestos safely in the schools that they own or for which they have a maintenance responsibility. The Voluntary Grammar (VG) schools and Grant Maintained Integrated (GMI) schools should have similar plans for the management and control of any residual asbestos in their schools.

The Department takes asbestos and other health and safety issues very seriously and aims, within the constraints of a prioritised budget, to mitigate any risks identified.

- (ii) There are currently 910 schools in the schools' estate (excluding the VG and GMI sectors) that may have some asbestos containing materials.

The following table indicates the numbers of schools (excluding the VG and GMI sectors) that have had asbestos containing materials removed over the last 5 years. As a general rule the removal of asbestos will have been on a partial basis at each school. It was not possible to obtain detailed information regarding the status of individual schools in the VG and GMI sectors within the available timescale.

Year	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10	2008/09	2007/08	Total
Number of Schools (exc VG and GMI)	146	162	188	188	169	853

Schools: Asbestos

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Education what consideration he has given to the report of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Occupational Safety and Health highlighting the dangerous levels of asbestos in schools nationwide; and whether he plans to implement any of the recommendations outlined in the report.

(AQW 8740/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department is acutely aware of the risk to the health of staff and pupils of education establishments posed by asbestos. Following the introduction of the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations (NI) 2003 and the Control of Asbestos (NI Order) 2007, there was a duty placed on the education sectors to ensure that asbestos is managed effectively. The Education and Library Boards (ELBs) were tasked with obtaining information regarding the extent of asbestos in the schools' estate. As a result, asbestos assessments of the schools' estate in the North of Ireland have already been carried out. These assessments show where asbestos is present in premises and there are detailed planned measures for managing identified risks, including monitoring the condition of and maintaining any asbestos containing material. Any material identified to be at 'high risk' was removed following the assessment.

The asbestos assessment data are held centrally by the Education and Library Boards. In addition all schools are required to have an asbestos register / management plan. A Department of Education circular (No. 2003/20) gives advice to the education sectors and schools on the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations (NI) 2003. This DE Circular is to be updated shortly to reflect any changes required as a result of revisions of the Regulations.

Asbestos removal is just one of many competing priorities for finance and is normally funded from the ELBs' maintenance budgets for the Controlled and Maintained estates. The Voluntary schools' sector generally funds work from their allocated budgets.

I consider, therefore, that the education sectors in the North of Ireland are already broadly complying with the recommendations in the report.

Trade Union: Secondment

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of (a) full-time; and (b) part-time staff who are currently on secondment from his Department, or its arm's length bodies, to each recognised trade union; (ii) the salary scale for each secondee; and (iii) the length of each secondment to date.

(AQW 8773/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:**DE**

Number	FT/PT	Salary Scale	Length of Secondment
1	Full-time	£23,336-£26,086	15 years
1	Part-time	£18,038-£22,180*	8.5 years

ALBS

Number	FT/PT	Salary Scale	Length of Secondment
1	Full-time	£15,726 - £16,830	Since 1 May 2005
1	Full-time	£27,849 - £30,011	Since 1 August 2005
1	Full-time	£15,726 - £16,830	Since 5 September 2011
1	Full-time	£22,221 - £26,276	Since 1 June 2002
1	Part-time	£17,161-£21,519*	Since 1 February 2006
1	Part-time	£17,161 - £21,519*	Since 1 April 2009
1	Part-time	£14,787 - £15,825*	Since 1 January 2010

*this is the full time rate for the grade, the part time secondee is paid pro rata for hours worked

Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005: Article 3

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Education how many schools in the Western Education and Library Board area are in breach of Article 3 Subsection 7 of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005.

(AQW 8785/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I understand that this question relates to Article 7 of the Education (NI) Order 1996, as substituted by Article 3 of SENDO.

In relation to Article 7, the Western Education and Library Board has advised that two schools are in breach of this legislation. The board is actively progressing the re-location of provisions from special schools to mainstream schools in line with this legislation.

Schools: Asbestos

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education (i) in how many schools asbestos is present; and (ii) whether he plans to begin a programme to remove the asbestos from those schools in which it poses a risk.

(AQW 8828/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

- (i) The Department is acutely aware of the risk to the health of staff and pupils of education establishments posed by asbestos. Following the introduction of the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations (NI) 2003 and the Control of Asbestos (NI Order) 2007, there is a duty placed on the education sectors to ensure that asbestos is managed effectively.

The Education and Library Boards were previously tasked with obtaining information regarding the extent of asbestos in the schools' estate and as a result, asbestos assessments of the schools' estate in the North of Ireland were carried out. These assessments identified where asbestos was present in premises. Following the assessments, detailed planned measures for managing

identified risks, including monitoring the condition of and maintaining any asbestos containing material were prepared. Any asbestos containing material determined to be at 'high risk' was removed following the assessments.

The number of schools in the estate (excluding the Voluntary Grammar and Grant Maintained Integrated sectors) that may still have some asbestos containing material is currently 910.

- (ii) It is current Government policy that provided asbestos is in good condition and is unlikely to be disturbed, it is better to be managed for the remaining life of the school rather than to disturb it. Asbestos is however removed, albeit on an ad-hoc basis, if it is likely to be disturbed as a result of refurbishments or other work being carried out at a school.

Homophobic Bullying

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education what action his Department is taking (i) to ensure that schools are welcoming places for pupils from lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender backgrounds; and (ii) to tackle homophobic bullying.

(AQW 8862/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

- (i) All young people have the right to be educated in a safe environment and to be treated with respect and dignity, irrespective of their sexual orientation. Schools have responsibilities to promote equality, good relations and diversity and in doing so, they must ensure that they are welcoming to all pupils. These responsibilities are driven by the Department's education policies, education and employment legislation and anti-discrimination, human rights and equality legislation.

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is an important element within the revised curriculum and is taught through the Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (in primary schools) and the Learning for Life and Work (in post-primary schools) areas of learning. Pupils also have opportunities to explore issues around diversity, inclusion and equality through Citizenship education. Teachers have been trained in all requirements of the curriculum and schools have been made aware of the wide range of RSE resources available. RSE is also inspected by the Education and Training Inspectorate.

The Department's Circular 2001/15 advises schools that they should have in place a policy setting out how they will address the delivery of RSE. The policy should be the subject of consultation with parents, and should be endorsed by the school's Board of Governors. In developing or reviewing their RSE policies, schools have been advised by DE Circular 2010/01 to take account of guidance produced by the Equality Commission on Eliminating Sexual Orientation Discrimination.

- (ii) The Department is committed to tackling the issue of bullying in schools and is pro-active in examining ways to prevent it.

The Department's publication 'Pastoral Care in Schools: Promoting Positive Behaviour' offers detailed guidance to support schools in tackling all forms of bullying and states that racist, homophobic, sectarian or other offensive name-calling is a form of bullying.

The Education and Library Boards provide in-service teacher training on anti-bullying and this is supplemented with school-based advice on preventative strategies. In 2010, an Inter-Board group launched 'Let's Stop Bullying', an inter-active CD-ROM developed for all primary and special schools, funded by the Department and made available through the C2K system.

The Department continues to fund and participate in the local Anti-Bullying Forum (NIABF) and the British and Irish Anti-Bullying Forum. In 2009, a homophobic bullying working group ensured that the Forum's website (www.niabf.org.uk) offered advice and guidance on this issue. This group has recently been reformed and is forming an action plan.

Pupils: Sexual Orientation

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education how his Department collects information on the identification of pupils who are gay and lesbian and their experience of the education system; and how his Department intends to improve this process.

(AQW 8863/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department uses information from surveys and wider research to understand gay and lesbian pupils' experiences of the education system and to respond to these. For example my Department works alongside others to provide specific guidance to schools, pupils and their parents on issues such as homophobic bullying and transgender bullying through sub-groups of the NI Anti-Bullying Forum.

I take my responsibilities with regard to equality very seriously and will ensure that my Department takes account of Equality Commission guidance on Section 75 responsibilities regarding the need to promote equality of opportunity and good relations among all pupils.

Community Use of School Premises

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education when the working group that has been established to develop guidance for schools to enhance the community use of school premises will commence work.

(AQW 8969/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The ELBs and CCMS have recently nominated representatives to participate in the working group established to develop the guidance for schools. DE officials are now arranging to meet with the working group during March to agree Terms of Reference (ToR). The ToR will include a timeline for the commencement and completion of this work.

Preschool Provision: Richhill, County Armagh

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Education whether he has any plans to increase the availability of funded pre-school provision in Richhill, Co Armagh.

(AQW 8988/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The pre-school admissions process for September 2012 is underway with applications at Stage 1 of the process currently being considered by providers.

A Pre-School Education Advisory Group (PEAG) in each Education and Library Board area manages this process on behalf of the Department.

The Southern Education and Library Board PEAG has advised that they have been approached to admit a new voluntary pre-school provider in Richhill to the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme (PSEEP) for September 2012. This request will be considered as part of the PEAG's ongoing management of the level of funded provision needed to meet demand in the area.

Staff Transfer

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education, to detail (i) whether he has any plans to relocate jobs from his departmental offices in Rathgael, Bangor; (ii) the number of jobs that will be affected; (iii) when the relocation will take place; (iv) to where the jobs will be relocated; and (iv) whether any compensation will be offered to staff.

(AQW 8993/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Based on current information approximately 39 staff based in Rathgael House will transfer to the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) on 1 April 2013. A decision on the future location of these staff will be taken in the context of a location strategy for the ESA as a whole, which is currently being developed. If staff are relocated, then the Civil Service terms and conditions on recompense for additional travel or relocation will apply in relation to the staff who are affected.

Special Needs Schools: Enrolments

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to detail the current enrolment number for each Special Needs school.

(AQW 9010/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below. The information is contained in the table below and is routinely published on the DENI website.

ENROLMENTS AT SPECIAL SCHOOLS – 2011/12

School name	Total Enrolment
Ardmore House Special School	8
Arvalee School and Resource Centre	112
Beechlawn Special School	161
Belmont House Special School	125
Brookfield Special School	123
Castletower School	256
Ceara Special School	102
Cedar Lodge Special School	166
Clarawood Special School	12
Clifton Special School	127
Donard Special School	66
Elmbrook Special School	40
Erne Special School	82
Fleming Fulton Special School	124
Foyleview Special School	110
Glenveagh Special School	193
Greenwood House Assessment Centre	57
Harberton Special School	200
Hill Croft Special School	95
Jordanstown Special School	47
Killard House Special School	153
Kilronan Special School	80
Knockavoe School & Resource Centre	93
Knockevin Special School	89
Lakewood Special School	6
Lisanally Special School	98
Longstone Special School	152
Mitchell House Special School	84

School name	Total Enrolment
Oakwood School and Assessment Centre	107
Park Education Resource Centre	126
Parkview Special School	159
Rathore School	138
Riverside Special School	46
Roddensvale Special School	90
Rossmar Special School	85
Rosstulla Special School	167
Sandelford Special School	138
Sperrinview Special School	94
St Gerard's Education Resource Centre	193
Thornfield Special School	88
Tor Bank Special School	157
Total	4,549

Source: School census

Civil Service: Posts

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of departmental staff, broken down by location.

(AQW 9012/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of full-time equivalent (FTE) departmental staff is detailed below:

Rathgael House, Bangor, Co Down	Waterside House, Derry	Purdy's Lane, Belfast	Total
458.01	113.68	4.00	575.69

STEM Qualifications

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how his Department intends to ensure that children understand that science and mathematics qualifications have a strong exchange value in the education and labour market and are not purely specialist routes.

(AQW 9024/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am clear about the important role education has in ensuring that pupils have the opportunities to develop the skills they need as future contributors to the economy in a fast-changing, globalised world, including recognising the expected growth in STEM-related areas.

The choices young people make at key transition points in their education particularly at Key Stage 4 under the Entitlement Framework, should aim to keep their options open for future progression into further or higher education, training or employment. Access to high quality, age appropriate, careers education, information, advice and guidance from school, careers advisors, employers and others underpins a pupil's choice. Schools are encouraged to take account of Labour Market Information and information on priority skills areas including STEM in offering access to a coherent and economically relevant choice of courses for pupils.

There are opportunities in the Mathematics and Numeracy and Science and Technology Areas of Learning within the curriculum to explore how the skills used in maths and science will be useful in a range of careers.

Pupils: Not Achieving GCSEs

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of (i) boys; and (ii) girls who have completed post-primary education without gaining any GCSEs at grades A*-C, or equivalent qualifications, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 9041/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Please see the table below.

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOL LEAVERS NOT ACHIEVING ANY GCSEs AT GRADES A*-C OR EQUIVALENT 2005/06 TO 2009/10

	2005/06		2006/07		2007/08		2008/09		2009/10	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Boys	2,786	21.4	2,461	19.5	2,054	16.9	1,609	13.9	1,283	11.3
Girls	1,459	11.7	1,357	11.1	1,166	9.8	948	8.1	725	6.3

Source: School Leavers Survey

Education and Library Board: Staff Contact with Pupils

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of (i) teachers; and (ii) staff currently employed by the Education and Library Boards, who have no direct class contact with pupils.

(AQW 9042/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards do not hold this information and it can only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

Braidside Integrated School, Ballymena: Newbuild

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education whether there are any plans to provide a permanent building at Braidside Integrated School, Ballymena, given that the existing premises are temporary and inadequate.

(AQW 9047/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As you are aware, I have commissioned the Education and Library Boards, working in conjunction with the CCMS and other sectors to co-ordinate collective, strategic area planning.

In any area, potential capital schemes will be critically assessed as part of the area planning process, to determine how they will contribute to the overall infrastructure required. No school building project will be looked at in isolation and will be considered in the context of the wider area with any future capital investment targeted at supporting area plans.

Until this work is completed I will not be in a position to comment on any potential project or individual school.

CRED Policy

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the operation of the Community Relations, Equality and Diversity Policy to date.

(AQW 9071/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Since the Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education (CRED) policy was launched in March 2011 significant progress has been made.

The focus has been on progressing enabling actions as detailed within the policy, including awareness raising across schools and youth organisations and the launch in January of a guidance document and self evaluation indicator framework to facilitate baselining and assessing progress.

Structures are in place to oversee implementation of the policy including a joint Youth and Schools Interboard Panel reporting to the Senior Education Officers Group within the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) and a CRED Reference Group within the Youth Council (YCNI).

A dedicated website (www.CREDNI.org) has been developed to support implementation of the policy and disseminate good practice. ELBs are leading on the development of a regional training strategy to ensure educators have the skills and experience to deliver curricular requirements relating to CRED and skills training is expected to commence in 2012/13.

ELBs have developed and implemented a CRED Enhancement Scheme, which has provided funding to over 200 schools and youth organisations to support projects which provide targeted interventions on community relations, equality and diversity issues across the range of section 75 groups. YCNI are overseeing the implementation of three strategic projects aimed at enhancing strategic connections for the delivery of CRED across the voluntary youth service.

Garvagh High School, Coleraine

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Education what plans there are for the future of Garvagh High School, Coleraine,
(AQW 9081/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Any significant change to a school, such as a school closure or amalgamation, requires the publication of a statutory Development Proposal to support that intent. It is the school managing authority, which is the North Eastern Education and Library Board in the case of Garvagh High School, in conjunction with the Board of Governors of an individual school that brings forward Development Proposals to the Department. The Department has not received a Development Proposal for this school.

Publication of a Development Proposal must be preceded by consultation between the school managing authority, school trustees, Board of Governors, staff and parents of the affected school as well as wider consultations with schools in the area. Once published, the Development Proposal process provides for a 2 month period during which comments can be sent directly to my Department. At the end of the two month period, I make a decision on the proposal taking account of all the pertinent issues and comments received.

Department for Employment and Learning

Welfare Reform Programme

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what discussions he has held with his Executive colleagues in relation to his Department's role in implementing vital aspects of the Welfare Reform programme after April 2012.

(AQW 7999/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): My Department is responsible for the work-focused aspects of the Welfare Reform programme. In the Welfare Reform context I have had a range of discussions with my Executive colleagues. I am a member of the Executive Sub-Committee on Welfare Reform which meets regularly to discuss plans for and progress on the Reform programme.

Students: Cross-border Study

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps his Department has taken to make it easier for students to apply to universities south of the border.

(AQW 8431/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department and I remain committed to ensuring that students from Northern Ireland continue to have a free choice of academic institution within the United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland and elsewhere.

My Department will continue to meet the cost of the registration fee (currently €2,000) for those students from Northern Ireland who will be undertaking a full-time undergraduate degree in the Republic of Ireland, entering in academic year 2012/13. Eligible students will also be able to apply for a non-repayable means-tested higher education bursary of up to £2,000, and a maintenance loan up to a maximum of £4,840.

Furthermore, following the publication of the Irish Business and Employers Confederation and the Confederation of British Industry (IBEC-CBI) Joint Business Council Report, 'A Study of Obstacles to Cross-border Undergraduate Education', the Irish Business and Employers Confederation has proposed the establishment of a forum to discuss the outcomes of the report and I have agreed that my Department will be represented on this forum.

Queen's University Belfast and Stranmillis University College: Proposed Merger

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 7182/11-15, to outline the responses of NIPSA and the University and College Union on the merger of Stranmillis University College and Queen's University Belfast, including the position of Stranmillis Union Branch.

(AQW 8560/11-15)

Dr Farry: The responses to which the member refers are already in the public domain and available on the following website: www.delni.gov.uk/index/consultation-zone/archived-consultations/archived-consultations-2011/stranmillis-qub-merger.htm

Further and Higher Education: All-Ireland Applications

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether any consideration has been given to the establishment of an Ireland-wide application process to further and higher education facilities.

(AQW 8621/11-15)

Dr Farry: Currently, applications to most Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Great Britain and Northern Ireland are made through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) system. Applications to HEIs in the Republic of Ireland are made through the Central Applications Office (CAO) system.

My Department's Careers Service provides impartial advice to young people and adults on appropriate further and higher education opportunities, including those available through UCAS, the CAO and direct application. This advice includes information on courses in Northern Ireland, ROI, GB and elsewhere, when relevant to an individual client.

Further and Higher Education: Cross-border Study

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) to detail any reports that have considered the mobility problems facing students who must cross the border to attend further and higher education facilities; (ii) what recommendations were contained within these reports; and (iii) to outline what steps his Department has taken as a result of the recommendations made.

(AQW 8623/11-15)

Dr Farry: In August 2011, the Irish Business and Employers Confederation and the Confederation of British Industry (IBEC-CBI) Joint Business Council published a report on Undergraduate Mobility. That report examined the obstacles to North-South undergraduate mobility and, whilst some factors

are likely beyond the control of either government, such as the higher cost of living in the Republic of Ireland, the report made a number of recommendations to increase student mobility in both directions across the border.

Each of the actions identified in the recommendations falls to one, or a combination of, the following organisations: The Department of Education and Skills (DES) in the Republic of Ireland, the Department of Education (DE), higher education institutions in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and my Department. A copy of the recommendations is attached at Annex A for your information.

Recommendation number 4 falls solely to my Department and states:

Action should be taken by the Northern Irish and British higher education authorities to end the anomaly – identified by the Stuart Report – under which Northern Ireland undergraduates studying in the Republic receive lower ‘bursaries’ compared to the maintenance grants paid to their counterparts studying in the UK.

In 2011, my Department’s public consultation on the future policy on higher education tuition fees and student finance arrangements invited views on potential changes to the current funding arrangements for Northern Ireland domiciled undergraduates who study in the Republic of Ireland.

My officials are continuing to consider the potential options.

The Irish Business and Employers Confederation has proposed the establishment of a forum to discuss the outcomes and key recommendations of the report and I have agreed that my Department will be represented on this forum.

Annex A

IBEC-CBI Joint Business Council

A Study of Obstacles to Cross-Border Undergraduate Education

Recommendations

- 1 Improve the quality and flow of information about university courses and entry requirements for school-leavers in both jurisdictions (and particularly for prospective Northern Ireland undergraduates who might want to go to university in the Republic of Ireland).

This would in the first instance be a task for the individual university admissions offices. Some Southern admissions officers have told this researcher that they are not convinced that the return (in terms of higher NI undergraduate applications) on such an improved information campaign would justify the expense at a time of severe financial cutbacks.

- 2 If dedicated inter-governmental funding were made available, a case might be made for a more coordinated campaign to recruit undergraduates on a cross-border basis, perhaps overseen by an organisation such as Universities Ireland, the all-island network of university presidents. However in the present and immediate future, with university fees significantly higher in Northern Ireland than the Republic of Ireland, it is likely that this will mainly lead to larger numbers of Northern undergraduates going to Southern universities. At the very least, a programme of visits by more school groups to university campuses in the other jurisdiction could be organised.

The 2011 Hunt Report says there is ‘significant potential for institutional collaboration on a North-South basis to advance cross-border regional development and strategically advance Irish higher education on an all-island basis.’ If this is going to be more than lip service (and not be shelved in the way that the proposals of the Williams Report were in the 1980s) some government resources will have to be provided to develop this collaboration.

- 3 The border region Institutes of Technology – Dundalk, Letterkenny and Sligo – which are almost invisible in Northern Ireland schools, should initiate a joint awareness-raising and recruitment campaign in border region schools in Northern Ireland. As a first step, they should take a joint stand at the annual UCAS Convention in Belfast.

- 4 Action should be taken by the Northern Irish and British higher education authorities to end the anomaly – identified by the Stuart Report – under which Northern Ireland undergraduates studying in the Republic receive lower ‘bursaries’ compared to the maintenance grants paid to their counterparts studying in the UK. The system of NI Education and Library Boards paying the registration fees of NI students at RoI universities should also be reviewed.
- 5 The two Northern Ireland universities should initiate an awareness-raising and induction scheme for students from Republic of Ireland to prepare them for living in a society which is still deeply divided along sectarian lines. This could include a ‘buddy system’ to link existing undergraduates (either Northerners or Southerners who had spent some time in the North) with newly arrived entrants from RoI.
- 6 The IUA-CCEA working group examining the equivalences between A Level and Leaving Certificate examination grades for Northern school-leavers applying to Southern universities should make its report available to the Irish university presidents charged by the Minister for Education and Skills with preparing options for change to the CAO system – in order to ensure that the most equitable system of equivalences possible is incorporated into a reformed CAO system.
- 7 There should be a rapid move towards a central agency – as recommended by the Hunt Report – to ensure the more efficient delivery of Republic of Ireland maintenance grants to all undergraduates, and particularly to those RoI undergraduates in Northern Ireland whose grants are ‘portable’. It is understood that this process has already started, and that negotiations have begun between the Department of Education and Skills and the City of Dublin VEC with a view to having CDVEC become that central delivery agency in 2012.
- 8 A Higher Education Authority/Department of Education and Skills task force should be established as soon as possible to examine the implications for Irish universities and undergraduates of the large university tuition fees that will be introduced in English and Welsh universities in the academic year 2012-2013.
- 9 A study should be commissioned by the Irish Department of Education and Skills and the Northern Ireland Department for Employment and Learning to examine the implications for higher education on the island of the future fall in the number of 18 year olds in the North and the high birth rate in the South feeding into higher demand for education places at all levels. Among other things, it should re-examine the recommendations of the Williams Report of 1985.

North West Regional College: Redundancies

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many staff at the North West Regional College received redundancy packages in (i) 2008; and (ii) 2011; and what was the total cost of the redundancy packages.

(AQW 8816/11-15)

Dr Farry: Each further education college, in its capacity as an employing authority, is responsible for all employment-related matters. Consequently, my Department does not hold the information requested by the Member. I have, therefore, referred this query to the North West Regional College Director, who will respond to the Member directly.

Teacher Education Infrastructure

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the outcome of the procurement exercise on the first part of the two-stage study of the teacher education infrastructure.

(AQW 9115/11-15)

Dr Farry: The procurement exercise for first part of the two-stage study of the teacher education infrastructure is still ongoing and no outcome can be reported at this time.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Town Centres: Support for Local Businesses

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what her Department is doing to prevent the decline in the use of high streets by retail outlets; and what initiatives are in place to ensure support for local businesses in town centres.

(AQW 6709/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Invest NI has taken a number of proactive steps to help Northern Ireland's businesses cope with the impact of the new economic uncertainty. Measures such as the new Growth Loan Fund, the Jobs Fund and the Boosting Business initiative have all been implemented in direct response to the prevailing economic conditions and, importantly, eligibility for them is not restricted solely to existing Invest NI clients.

A comprehensive guide to all of Invest NI's financial and advisory support is available from the agency's website at www.investni.com. In addition, Invest NI's nibusinessinfo.co.uk website offers easy to use, comprehensive and up to date practical advice and guidance on all aspects of starting, running and growing a business with access to over 70 business support tools, best practice case studies and access to funding options as well as wider support.

In addition a number of other Departments, DSD, DFP and DOE have an involvement in this issue. For example, the Department for Social Development has a number of initiatives that are used in an attempt to prevent the overall decline in our towns and city centres, these are Comprehensive Development Schemes, Public Realm Schemes and reStore.

DFP are responsible for the Small Business Rates Relief Scheme which currently provides help to up to 16,000 small business premises. As the Member will be aware the Executive has agreed to expand this Scheme, providing additional support of around £6 million to up to 8,300 business ratepayers in 2012/13.

DOE has responsibility for Policy Planning Statement (PPS) 5, "Retailing and Town Centres". I understand that the Environment Minister will soon be announcing his intention to give weight to draft PPS 5 "Town Centres and Commercial Leisure Developments, a document which also favours the focus of retail development in town centres.

'Our Time, Our Place': Orange Events

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why the Twelfth July, Scarva and the centenary of the Ulster Covenant are excluded from the Northern Ireland Tourist Board's Our Time, Our Place showcase; and what she intends to do to address this.

(AQW 7714/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Three Twelfth of July Flagship events for 2012 have been confirmed as Carrickfergus, Ballynahinch and Enniskillen and are on the discovernorthernireland.com and the ni2012.com portal. Further details about the full range of activities taking place as part of the Flagships will be posted nearer the event once information becomes available.

Belfast Orangefest have already uploaded basic information on their event via Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau to discovernorthernireland.com and details are also on the ni2012.com portal.

The Royal Black Institution will not have the information on the Scarva Sham Fight until end of March 2012 and when received this will be uploaded by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB). NITB will also publicise relevant details on the centenary of the Ulster Covenant when available.

Civil Service: Tender Guidelines

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of recent issues highlighting the failure of some civil servants to meet their own tendering guidelines, to detail her Department's tender processes.

(AQW 8002/11-15)

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 disseminates advice and guidance on public procurement policies including tendering guidelines through Procurement Policy Guidance Notes. These can be found on the CPD website at http://www.dfni.gov.uk/index/procurement-2/cpd/cpd_publications/content_-_cpd_-_policy_-_procurement_guidance_notes.htm .

Airlines: International Carriers

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) what measures she has, or intends, to put in place to support efforts to attract new international airline carriers; (ii) what formal co-operation she has established with the industry; and (iii) whether there is specialised team in place to address this matter.

(AQW 8038/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Convenient, competitive and direct access is essential to the development of tourism to Northern Ireland. Tourism Ireland plays a lead role in investing in co-operative marketing with airlines, airports and other tourism interests to drive demand for air services from key overseas markets to Northern Ireland and to help maintain our vital network of routes. Tourism Ireland is therefore in dialogue with Northern Ireland airports on an ongoing basis in relation to any opportunities for new, extended or re-instated services. In addition, my Department has appointed Avia Solutions, by open competition, to provide specialist aviation advice and assistance as required.

To maximise the opportunities presented by 2012, my Department has provided Tourism Ireland with funding to deliver an access development fund to increase direct air services to Northern Ireland and to drive increased visitor numbers in the short term on existing services (this initiative also extends to ferry services). This increased co-operative activity with air (and sea) carriers will add to the extensive programme of activity planned by Tourism Ireland both in the immediate term and throughout 2012.

Agrifood Sector: Employment

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail, for each of the last ten years, (i) the number of people employed in the agri-food sector; (ii) the number of businesses active in the agri-food sector; and (iii) the level of grants that has been provided to businesses in the agri-food sector.

(AQW 8183/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Agri-food sector includes Agriculture as well as Food and Drink processing and the information provided below reflects this. In addition you should note that the figures in this response, on the food processing component of the agri-food sector, relate only to businesses where the products are destined for human consumption – and so therefore exclude activities such as the production of animal feeds and pet food.

Part (i) Data on the number of employee jobs in the Food and Drink Processing subsector can be obtained from the biennial Census of Employment. You should note that these figures may differ from the number of people employed in the subsector, as one person may have more than one job. The latest available data is for September 2009.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF EMPLOYEE JOBS IN THE FOOD AND DRINK PROCESSING COMPONENT OF THE AGRI-FOOD SECTOR, SEPTEMBER 2001 TO SEPTEMBER 2009

Year	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009
Number of Employee Jobs	17,256	17,342	17,330	17,293	17,538

Source: Census of Employment, NISRA

Information on the number of people working on farms is collected by DARD and is outlined in Table 2 below. The workforce includes full time, part time, casuals, spouses and employees as well as farmers and family workers. However, it does not include persons working on a contractual basis.

TABLE 2: NUMBER OF PERSONS WORKING ON FARMS

Year	Workforce	Year	Workforce
2001	56,362	2007	48,974
2002	54,273	2008	48,964
2003	54,486	2009	48,031
2004	53,332	2010	46,948
2005	51,073	2011	46,848
2006	49,952		

Source: June Agricultural and Horticultural survey, DARD

Part (ii) Data on the number of businesses active in the Food and Drink Processing subsector can be obtained from the Office for National Statistics' Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR), from which Northern Ireland holds data back to 2003.

TABLE 3: NUMBER OF BUSINESSES ACTIVE IN THE FOOD AND DRINK PROCESSING COMPONENT OF THE AGRI-FOOD SECTOR, SEPTEMBER 2003 TO SEPTEMBER 2011

Year	Number of Businesses
2003	445
2004	435
2005	415
2006	410
2007	400
2008	385
2009	370
2010	385
2011	380

Source: Inter-Departmental Business Register, ONS

Note: Figures are rounded to the nearest 5

Information on the number of farm businesses is collected by DARD and is shown in the table below.

TABLE 4: NUMBER OF FARMS 2001-2011

Year	Businesses	Year	Businesses
2001	29,818	2007	26,146
2002	28,513	2008	25,952
2003	28,281	2009	25,264
2004	27,600	2010	24,471
2005	27,064	2011	24,436
2006	26,739		

Source: June Agricultural and Horticultural survey, DARD

Part (iii) Financial assistance, offered by Invest NI, to support projects in the food processing component of the agri-food sector is detailed below, along with the number of jobs each project was expected to create or safeguard. Invest NI was formed on 1st April 2002 and therefore information on the level of grants provided by Invest NI is only available from this point onwards.

TABLE 5: INVEST NI OFFERS OF ASSISTANCE TO AGRI-FOOD SECTOR

Financial Year	Total Assistance (£ million)	New jobs	Safe Jobs
2002-03	5.18	132	295
2003-04	4.96		554
2004-05	11.99	81	704
2005-06	9.82	354	326
2006-07	4.89	353	131
2007-08	5.34	293	113
2008-09	6.52	370	120
2009-10	11.22	394	381
2010-11	7.85	284	1,214
Grand Total	67.77	2,260	3,838

Source: Invest NI

In addition DARD also provides a range of grants to agriculture and food, which are detailed in Table 6 below.

TABLE 6: DARD CAPITAL GRANTS PAYABLE TO AGRICULTURE AND FOOD (CALENDAR YEARS)

Capital Grants (£ million)	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Farm and Conservation Grant Scheme	0.30	0.15	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Environmentally Sensitive Areas	-	-	-	-	-	0.30	0.37	0.21	0.01	-

Capital Grants (£ million)	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Investment in agricultural holdings	-	-	0.31	1.30	2.73	0.13	-	-	-	-
Organic Farming (Conversion of Animal Housing) Scheme	-	-	-	0.76	0.81	0.39	-	-	-	-
Farm Nutrient Management Scheme	-	-	-	0.37	12.17	16.66	92.46	-	-	-
Countryside Management Scheme	-	-	-	-	-	0.56	0.78	0.44	0.02	-
Farm Modernisation Scheme	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2.18	2.09	5.82
Process and Marketing Grants Scheme	4.80	2.30	7.40	5.50	7.30	-	2.70	2.80	2.90	3.10
Total capital grants	5.10	2.45	7.71	7.93	23.01	18.04	96.30	5.63	5.03	8.92

Source: DARD

Notes:

- 1 These data relate to monies due rather than monies actually received (ie. they are on an accruals basis).
- 2 Dashes indicate nil or payments of less than £50,000

Single Electricity Market

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of whether the fact that being part of a single electricity market on the island of Ireland and that the policy for renewable electricity is set by the British Government is counterproductive; and what action her Department intends to take to address this situation.

(AQW 8186/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The principles under which the Single Electricity Market (SEM) was established in 2007 were to provide for a competitive, sustainable and reliable market in electricity in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland at the minimum cost necessary and to operate in the context of the EU internal energy market.

Renewable electricity policy is devolved to Northern Ireland and is not set by the United Kingdom Government. However, as part of the United Kingdom, electricity consumers in Northern Ireland benefit from having the costs of renewable electricity incentivisation spread across all United Kingdom consumers. Such benefits would not be possible in the smaller all-island market. Keeping the cost to consumers as low as possible is helped by close alignment to wider United Kingdom renewable electricity policy.

Northern Ireland contributes to the wider United Kingdom targets imposed by the European Commission on Member States to increase renewable energy demand by 2020. As a separate Member State, the Republic of Ireland has its own target and renewable electricity incentivisation policy.

The Department is working with the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland Governments to establish an EU-wide Internal Market in electricity by 2014 with the common aim of providing for the safe, secure, sustainable and affordable flow of electricity across borders and to ensure the best possible outcome for Northern Ireland consumers.

‘Our Time, Our Place’: Funding

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the total amount committed in the (a) 2010/11; and (ii) 2011/12 budget periods to advertise ‘ni 2012 Our Time Our Place’; and (ii) the amount of money provided to each organisation which featured in the advertisement. **(AQW 8192/11-15)**

Mrs Foster: In order to promote the significant number of events in 2012 Northern Ireland Tourist Board, which has responsibility for marketing Northern Ireland in the domestic market and the Republic of Ireland, has committed to investing over £1.6million to date, in the 2011/12 financial period. No investment was made in the 2010/11 financial period to promote ni2012. A donation of £500 location usage rights was paid to one organisation featured in the advertisement.

Tourism Ireland, which markets Northern Ireland worldwide, has committed £4.7million for marketing ni2012. The majority of the money will be spent in the Great Britain market, which is our most important market. £1million of this investment has been invested in co-operative marketing campaigns with air and sea carriers.

Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises: DETI Spend

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much her Department has spent on conferences, away-days and team building exercises in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8205/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Please see table below:

Division	Amount	Financial Year
*Conferences		2008/2009
Away Days		
Team Building	£ 67.00	
*Conferences		2009/2010
Away Days	£ 397.00	
Team Building	£ 79.00	
*Conferences	£ 2710.00	2010/2011
Away Days	£ 1706.00	
Team Building	£ 42.00	

Energy Prices: Increases

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of recent increases in energy prices and the publication of the Consumer Council’s analysis of the McIlDoon report, how she, and the Utility Regulator, will ensure that the current market structures provide an equitable distribution of risk between energy consumers and industry shareholders.

(AQW 8207/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The energy industry in Northern Ireland is fully privatised and consists of both equity and mutualised energy companies. I am confident that the Energy (NI) Order 2003, the Electricity (Single

Wholesale Market) (NI) Order 2007, the Electricity (NI) Order 1992, and the Gas (NI) Order 1996 have established an effective framework for regulating the electricity and natural gas sectors, and that the Utility Regulator, in liaison with my Department, is working to deliver effective market conditions which include the protection of electricity and natural gas consumers with regard to price and quality of service.

The McIlldoon Report focused on electricity price increases in 2008. These price increases were largely driven by rises in international gas prices. Fuel prices for power stations can increase and this is a real and unavoidable risk. Consumers of energy either take this risk or pay someone else to take it for them. Energy market structures all over the world cannot prevent a rise in fuel prices. They can only ensure that no more than the actual price rise is faced by consumers. This is achieved in the Single Electricity Market because generators are only allowed to bid their actual fuel costs and the market is regulated accordingly.

Energy Prices: Increases

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of recent increases in energy prices and the publication of the Consumer Council's analysis of the McIlldoon report, how she, and the Utility Regulator, will ensure that electricity generators are not overpaid within the Single Electricity Market and that all possible pressure is placed on them to ensure that electricity is produced at the lowest possible cost for consumers.

(AQW 8211/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Single Electricity Market (SEM) is based on a 'Gross Mandatory Pool', which means that all generators above 10MW must sell their electricity through this pool and all suppliers are required to buy from it. The system is objective and transparent and is widely accepted by economists and energy experts worldwide to be an efficient means of setting the market price i.e. it provides the best price to the consumer. This is supported by the fact that SEM prices are closely correlated to fuel (mainly gas) prices. The SEM is also significantly regulated to prevent any abuse of market power by a dominant participant.

Energy Prices: Increases

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of recent increases in energy prices and the publication of the Consumer Council's recent analysis of the McIlldoon report, how she, and the Utility Regulator, will ensure that the level of investment risk within the regulated energy markets is correct, and that consumers are not paying towards higher than necessary capital costs for energy infrastructure projects.

(AQW 8212/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Energy (NI) Order 2003, the Electricity (Single Wholesale Market) (NI) Order 2007, the Electricity (NI) Order 1992, and the Gas (NI) Order 1996 establish the regulatory framework in respect of the electricity and natural gas industries in Northern Ireland. In line with these arrangements, the Utility Regulator has an important role in undertaking regular Price Controls of the regulated utilities who own and operate energy networks. As part of the Price Control process, the Utility Regulator carries out a rigorous scrutiny of an energy company's proposed expenditure over an identified period in order to determine the future level of revenue and associated incentives for that company. Price Controls must balance the need to ensure that energy companies can continue to fund their operations and have sufficient resources to ensure security of energy supply and deliver necessary investment, along with the need to ensure that these companies can provide a high standard of service to consumers at a fair price. The Price Control process ensures that only efficient costs are passed onto consumers.

My Department has no direct role in the Price Control process but continues to co-operate with the Utility Regulator and respective energy companies to ensure that market arrangements are in place which should act to put downward pressure on energy costs while protecting consumers with regard to price and quality of service.

Digital Hub: Belfast

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the siting of a digital hub in Belfast is a priority for her Department.

(AQW 8214/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Creative Industries are identified as a priority sector in helping to rebuild and rebalance the Northern Ireland economy. My Department and Invest NI will continue to work closely with a range of stakeholders both in Belfast, and across Northern Ireland in general, to support the development and growth of the Creative Industries.

It is my understanding that Belfast City Council is currently considering a study to assess the feasibility of creating a Digital Hub in Belfast. If the study is positive and if there is a clear alignment to Invest NI's priorities, Belfast City Council will consider making an application for funding under the Local Economic Development (LED) Measure to support the sector's growth in Belfast.

Economic Activity Rate

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if she will make a statement on the monthly trend in the economic activity rate since June 2009.

(AQW 8224/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Trend statistics for the Northern Ireland economic activity rate since April – June 2009 are presented in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1: ECONOMIC ACTIVITY RATE FROM 2009 – 2011

Quarter	NI		UK	
	16+	16-64	16+	16-64
Apr-Jun 2009	57.9	68.6	63.4	76.9
Jul-Sep 2009	58.6	69.4	63.3	76.7
Oct-Dec 2009	58.9	69.8	63.2	76.6
Jan-Mar 2010	59.7	70.8	63.1	76.5
Apr-Jun 2010	59.8	71.2	63.2	76.6
Jul-Sep 2010	59.9	71.2	63.4	76.8
Oct-Dec 2010	60.1	71.7	63.3	76.6
Jan-Mar 2011	60.4	72.2	63.3	76.8
Apr-Jun 2011	61.7	73.4	63.3	76.8
Jul-Sep 2011	61.2	72.9	63.1	76.7
Oct-Dec 2011	61.1	72.8	63.2	76.9

Source: Labour Force Survey, DFP

Each and every month the latest figures on economic activity are published within a Labour Market Report produced by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. The latest report can be accessed at http://www.detini.gov.uk/lmr_february_2012.pdf. In addition, each month, I comment on the latest labour market figures via a Press Statement which includes details of Northern Ireland's economic inactivity. Furthermore my Department produces an Economic Commentary three times a year which assesses the most recent trends in the Northern Ireland economy. The November 2011 edition of this commentary provided an assessment of the trend in economic inactivity during the economic downturn.

Tamboran Resources Ltd: Insurance Bonds

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what further consideration has been given to the suggestion that Tamboran Resources should provide a bond to insure against liability and potential indemnities arising from adverse environmental and health impacts as a result of hydraulic fracturing; and to detail the financial protection that such a bond would afford.

(AQW 8247/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Officials in my Department have been liaising with their counterparts in the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) in order to understand the requirements for insurance and bonds that exist in mature producing hydrocarbons provinces such as the North Sea and onshore Great Britain. My Department will then discuss the options with the regulatory authorities responsible for environmental protection and planning in Northern Ireland. It should be noted that DECC is responsible for environmental and decommissioning issues offshore UK whereas those responsibilities fall to the Environment Agency and Local Planning Authorities for onshore hydrocarbons in Great Britain.

Hydraulic Fracturing: Petroleum Licences

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 7217/11-15, (i) whether the granting of petroleum licences for hydraulic fracturing operations was not subject to a strategic environmental assessment because the petroleum licensing onshore Northern Ireland is defined as a plan or programme for energy, and was adopted before 21 July 2004 in accordance with the Petroleum (Production) Act (Northern Ireland) 1964 and the Petroleum Production Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1987; and (ii) to confirm whether the Notice (2010/C169/4), published by the Department in the Official Journal of the European Union, announcing the availability of all of onshore Northern Ireland for Petroleum Licence applications and inviting applications by 27 August 2011, was a plan or programme for energy as defined by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004.

(AQW 8255/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department considers that the policy decision to establish a petroleum licensing regime, by means of the Petroleum (Production) Act (Northern Ireland) 1964 and the Petroleum Production Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1987, whereby all of onshore Northern Ireland was made available for licensing, constituted a plan or programme for energy adopted before 21 July 2004.

My Department considers that the decision to publish a Notice (2010/C169/4) in the Official Journal of the European Union, announcing the availability of all of onshore Northern Ireland for Petroleum Licence applications and inviting applications by 27 August 2011, was not a plan or programme for energy as defined by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004. This Notice was published in accordance with Regulation 3 of the Hydrocarbons Licensing Directive Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 which were a legal prerequisite to ensure that the petroleum licensing regime in Northern Ireland complied with the requirements of Directive 94/22/EC. As such, DETI concluded that this did not constitute a plan or programme separate from that of the original decision to make all of onshore Northern Ireland available for petroleum licensing described in i) above.

No petroleum licences have been granted for hydraulic fracturing operations. Hydraulic fracturing is a technical process designed to enhance the production of hydrocarbons from a well and, as such, requires approvals separate from the granting of a petroleum licence before it can be undertaken.

Wi-Fi Access: Hotels

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to list the Tourist Board certified hotels that provide wi-fi access.

(AQW 8269/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) has certified 135 hotels, of these 47 have advised they provide Wi-Fi access. The names are:

- Park Avenue Hotel, Belfast
- Downshire Arms Hotel, Banbridge
- Mahons Hotel, Irvinestown
- Killyhevlin Hotel & Health Club, Enniskillen
- Royal Court Hotel, Portrush
- Bushmills Inn Hotel, Bushmills
- Ballygally Castle Hotel, Ballygally
- Stormont Hotel, Belfast
- Seagoe Hotel, Portadown
- Beechlawn House Hotel, Dunmurry, Belfast
- Manor House Country Hotel, Killadeas, Enniskillen
- Tullyglass House Hotel, Ballymena
- Europa Hotel, Belfast
- Ashburn Hotel, Lurgan
- La Mon Hotel & Country Club, Comber
- Lodge Hotel, Coleraine
- Slieve Donard Resort & Spa, Newcastle
- Everglades Hotel, Londonderry
- Dobbins Inn Hotel, Carrickfergus
- Burrendale Hotel, Country Club and Spa, Newcastle
- Bushtown Hotel, Coleraine
- Best Western Magherabuoy House Hotel, Portrush
- The Valley Hotel, Fivemiletown
- Templeton Hotel, Templepatrick
- Travelodge Belfast Central, Belfast
- Malone Lodge Hotel, Belfast
- Tullylagan Country House, Cookstown
- Clandeboye Lodge Hotel, Bangor
- Clarion Hotel, Carrickfergus
- Jurys Inn Belfast, Belfast
- Westville Hotel, Enniskillen
- Canal Court Hotel, Newry
- Ballymac Hotel, Lisburn
- Hilton Templepatrick, Templepatrick
- Hilton Belfast, Belfast
- Benedicts of Belfast, Belfast
- Holiday Inn Belfast, Belfast
- Ramada Da Vinci's Hotel, Londonderry
- Ramada Portrush, Portrush
- Days Hotel Belfast City Centre, Belfast
- Radisson Blu Hotel Belfast, Belfast
- Malmaison, Belfast
- Dunsilly Hotel, Antrim
- The Merchant Hotel, Belfast
- Lough Erne Resort, Enniskillen
- Park Inn Hotel Belfast, Belfast
- IBIS Belfast Queens Quarter, Belfast

Wi-Fi Access: Restaurants and Cafes

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to list the restaurants and cafes that provide wi-fi access.

(AQW 8270/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Comprehensive information on restaurants and cafes that provide Wi-Fi access is not collected or held by the Department.

Energy Prices: Increases

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of recent increases in energy prices and the publication of the Consumer Council's recent analysis of the McIlDoon report, how she, and the Utility Regulator, will ensure that all possible policy and regulatory instruments are used to tackle the growing levels of fuel poverty.

(AQW 8276/11-15)

Mrs Foster: DETI and the Utility Regulator are committed to working alongside others in seeking to tackle the current levels fuel poverty. Both parties are represented on the newly formed Joint Forum on Fuel Poverty, which also includes the Consumer Council, and is chaired by Social Development Minister, Nelson McCausland.

Visas: Tourists from Asia

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when she was first made aware that many tourists from the Asian market require a separate Visa to cross the border.

(AQW 8292/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am aware that as a different jurisdiction, the Republic of Ireland operates a separate visa regime from that administered by the United Kingdom. Therefore visitors, such as those from Asia, require a United Kingdom visa to visit Northern Ireland.

The Republic of Ireland has introduced a Visa Waiver Scheme for nationals of 16 countries who hold a valid visa for entry into the United Kingdom.

I understand there are security and resource implications which currently prevent the introduction of a reciprocal scheme for those entering Northern Ireland with a valid Irish visa, including visitors from Asia. I have raised this issue with the Northern Ireland Office and will continue to raise the issue with both Governments.

Visas: Waiver Scheme

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she has discussed with the Secretary of State the possibility of introducing a Visa Waiver Scheme to increase the number of tourists visiting the rest of the island of Ireland to come north.

(AQW 8293/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Republic of Ireland currently operates a Visa Waiver Scheme for nationals of 16 countries who hold a valid visa for entry into the United Kingdom. I have discussed the possibility of reciprocal scheme in respect of Northern Ireland with Hugo Swire MP, Minister of State at the Northern Ireland Office.

I understand there are security and resource implications which currently prevent the introduction of a reciprocal scheme for those entering Northern Ireland with a valid Irish visa. I will continue to raise this issue with both Governments.

North/South Electricity Interconnector

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she has received representations from the Utility Regulator regarding the proposed North-South electricity interconnector; and whether the Regulator is supportive of the project.

(AQW 8328/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Utility Regulator advocated the need for extra interconnection as part of the Department's work to develop an All Island Energy Market Framework in 2004. Since then, the Regulator has continued to support the need for the interconnector. The Regulator has also briefed the Northern Ireland Assembly's Committee for Enterprise Trade and Investment on the need for the interconnector to reduce the cost of system constraints within the Single Electricity Market.

North/South Electricity Interconnector

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the importance of planning permission being granted in this calendar year for the proposed North-South electricity interconnector.

(AQW 8329/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Planning Appeals Commission will start its public inquiry into NIE's application for a new North South Inter-connector on 6 March 2012. This will allow full consideration of the merits of, and objections to, the line. It is important to bring certainty to the market on this important issue as soon as possible so I hope the inquiry can be completed and a decision reached before the end of 2012.

Geothermal Energy: Legislative Framework

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department plans to bring forward a legislative framework for geothermal energy in the next three years.

(AQW 8356/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department recognises the need for a legislative framework for geothermal energy in Northern Ireland. Although no decision has yet been taken on the timescale for the preparation of such legislation, officials are monitoring the progress being made towards such a framework in the UK and will consider how applicable this would be to Northern Ireland.

PROGRESS Micro-finance Scheme

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much funding has been drawn down from the €500 million PROGRESS micro-finance scheme; and what steps her Department has taken to increase drawdown.

(AQW 8428/11-15)

Mrs Foster: To date, no amounts have been drawn down from the PROGRESS micro-finance scheme by any intermediary within the UK.

The cap rate of 20% is a major disadvantage of this scheme and operates in a similar way to the relatively unused Enterprise Finance Guarantee Scheme in Northern Ireland. Invest NI estimates that this would only provide a maximum guarantee of £180k in respect of its proposed £5 million Small, Micro, Medium Enterprises (SMME) Loan Fund.

The proposed SMME Loan Fund is Invest NI's direct response to the financing difficulties faced by micro enterprises and is expected to be operational by July 2012. It will provide unsecured loans of between £1k and £50k to start-up and growth potential individuals or companies and social enterprises in the SME and micro enterprise size range.

An economic appraisal was carried out by independent consultants on behalf of Invest NI that clearly identified market failure in the provision of debt finance to small, micro and medium enterprises. Whilst due consideration was given to the European PROGRESS micro-finance facility during the establishment of the proposed Invest NI £5 million SMME Loan Fund, a detailed review of the terms and conditions pertaining to the PROGRESS facility concluded that the disadvantages together with the additional cost of the resulting reporting burden and the timeframe to establish Invest NI as an approved intermediary, meant that the SMME Loan Fund initiative was approved without PROGRESS.

Invest NI remains open to considering PROGRESS at some future date, and indeed, its tender papers for fund management services for the proposed £5 million SMME Loan Fund will seek evidence of experience of PROGRESS (or its predecessor guarantee).

VAT-registered Businesses: North Antrim

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how she plans to increase the number of VAT registered businesses in the North Antrim constituency.

(AQW 8464/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI works actively with businesses in the North Antrim area, both VAT and non VAT registered, to encourage and stimulate sales growth which, in due course, would in the majority of cases lead to VAT registration.

New start and existing businesses can avail of a range of support both financial and advisory. Invest NI recently launched its Boosting Business initiative, promoting its range of support under the five themes of Jobs, R & D, Exports, Technology and Skills. Its Jobs Fund is being actively promoted to businesses which lack the working capital needed to increase employment levels to take advantage of growth opportunities.

Invest NI also has a dedicated Global Starts team whose role it is to identify early stage companies with high growth potential and provide specific, tailored support to help accelerate the growth of these, usually technology-based, companies in export markets. Services offered by the Global Starts team are available to clients in the North Antrim area.

Invest NI's North Eastern Regional Office is also working closely with Councils in the North Antrim area to develop a range of new programmes targeted at small and locally focused businesses. These programmes are submitted for funding under the Local Economic Development (LED) measure of the Sustainable Competitiveness Programme. Invest NI is also working with Councils in the area to map key drivers of economic development and to develop, in partnership, new products/services that can impact on wider economic development in areas such as North Antrim.

As a result of such engagement, Invest NI has developed, in partnership with other stakeholder, an initiative aimed at small independent retailers which has been piloted successfully in several Council areas including Ballymena.

The North Eastern Office continues to work closely with other stakeholder organisations in the North Antrim area, including in particular Local Enterprise Agencies, to support the growth of small and micro businesses.

Northern Workforce Development Forum: Ballymena

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given that figures in the latest Labour Market Profile show that 14.3 percent of people who work in the Northern Workforce Development Forum do so in Ballymena, what plans she has to encourage and rejuvenate trade in the town.

(AQW 8465/11-15)

Mrs Foster: With regards to Trade, my Department's primary aim is to encourage companies, including those located in the Ballymena area, to sell their products and services in international markets. Northern Ireland's domestic market is too small to drive the private sector growth required to make a step-change in our economy. Sustained growth can only be achieved by helping our business base to develop the products and services to enter and exploit export markets for the first time and then by supporting them to identify market opportunities, undertake market visits and enter and succeed in additional growth markets.

Too many of our existing exporters have historically relied on the ROI or GB markets from which to generate external sales, however, continued economic uncertainty in these markets will mean our exporters will need to broaden their horizons. A significant amount of future global growth will continue to come from emerging markets and we will support ambitious companies to explore and exploit opportunities in these markets. A key focus will remain on the BRIC countries of Brazil, Russia, India and China and we will continue to monitor and strategically target opportunities which emerge from the CIVETS grouping (Columbia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt, Turkey and South Africa) as well as the cash-rich countries of the Middle East.

During the last three years, (1st April 2009 to 28th February 2012) companies in the Ballymena District Council area have participated in the following Invest NI trade activities:

- 154 participations in trade missions, exhibitions and export seminars targeted on overseas markets;
- 19 participations in export and trade focused workshops;
- 49 interventions relating to marketing support from trade advisers in key overseas markets;
- 37 interventions relating to specific consultancy projects to strengthen trade and export capabilities; and,
- In November 2011, 24 companies attended the Focus on Finance Workshop held in Ballymena. 11 of these companies are availing of the one to one financial appraisal support available after participation on the workshop.

I am also acutely aware of the trading difficulties being faced by those locally-focused businesses, particularly those operating within the retail sector, located throughout Northern Ireland. My Department recognises that retail spending is a significant contributor to the economic well being of Northern Ireland. Independent retailers, such as those located in Ballymena town centre, are under increasing pressure as a result of the recession, rising costs, the impact of online shopping and the dominance of the multiples.

In recognition of these pressures and the fact that expenditure in national multiples and online represents a leakage from the Northern Ireland economy, Invest NI has engaged with other stakeholders to help develop a framework for a retail initiative. This focuses on four key elements: trends in retail, the impact of technology, the importance of the retail environment and the in-store experience. This initiative has been delivered in two Council areas (including Ballymena) on a pilot basis, in partnership with the University of Ulster, Business in the Community and the South Eastern Regional College.

Finally, you will be aware that lead responsibility for urban regeneration resides with the Department for Social Development. In relation to encouraging and rejuvenating trade in Ballymena town centre, my colleague the Minister for Social Development has been pushing forward with the implementation of the measures outlined in the Ballymena masterplan. In the coming year, his Department will fund a revitalisation project aimed at boosting trading conditions in the Church Street area of the town centre. DSD also plans to implement a significant public realm scheme in the town centre in 2013/2014, subject to the necessary funding being available and promote a development scheme on a large derelict site on Bridge Street. Invest NI is also working closely with Ballymena Town Centre Development Company Limited in the implementation of its recently launched strategy for the development of the town centre.

North/South Electricity Interconnector

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) what representations she has received from the Renewables Industry regarding the proposed North-South electricity interconnector; (ii) for her assessment of the benefits of the interconnector in generating investment and employment in the renewables industry sector; (iii) whether the interconnector will help meet the 2020 climate change target of producing 40 percent of electricity from renewable energy sources.

(AQW 8467/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I have not received any representations from the Renewables Industry specifically regarding the North-South interconnector. In its 2011 Report "Inquiry into Barriers to the Development of Renewable Energy Production and its Associated Contribution to the Northern Ireland Economy" the Committee for Enterprise Trade and Investment concluded that the interconnector was a vitally important element of infrastructure both from an energy and economic perspective. I agree with that finding.

The extra transmission capacity of the proposed Interconnector is important for large scale development of renewable power, allowing the transmission grid and Single Electricity Market to work more efficiently. In order to meet the 2020 target it is vital that the Interconnector proceeds at the earliest opportunity.

Hydraulic Fracturing: Petroleum Licences

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the current regulations, governing petroleum licensing, would permit gas companies to hydraulically fracture shale rock, with the use of chemicals underneath land, without the express permission of the landowner, and without any requirement to compensate the landowner.

(AQW 8469/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Petroleum (Production) Act (NI) 1964 and the subordinate legislation made under that Act vests undeveloped petroleum in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. It also authorises the Department to grant licences to search and bore for and get petroleum.

Any licence granted under the Act may expressly specify conditions with respect to damage or injury resulting from or arising out of the exercise of any right authorised by the licence or the ancillary right.

Section 4 of the Act makes provision for compensation in relation to the petroleum vested in the Department under the 1964 Act.

Hydraulic Fracturing: Petroleum Licences

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 7217/11-15, whether she intends to undertake a strategic environmental assessment for the current or next round of onshore oil and gas licensing.

(AQW 8470/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Applications for petroleum licences in Northern Ireland may be made at any time and are not subject to licensing rounds (in accordance with “the open door procedure” described in Article 3 (3) of the Hydrocarbons Directive 94/22/EC). The establishment of an initial window for applications to be submitted by 27 August 2011 in Notice (2010/C169/4), published by the Department in the Official Journal of the European Union, was solely for the purpose of ensuring that initial applications for petroleum licences were treated in a non-discriminatory manner, following the introduction of The Hydrocarbons Licensing Directive Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 and The Petroleum Production (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010.

Regulation 11 of The Hydrocarbons Licensing Directive Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 amended section 1 of the Petroleum Act (Northern Ireland) 1964 to include the strata beneath the internal waters adjacent to Northern Ireland. A strategic environmental assessment will be carried out before the internal waters are made available for petroleum licensing because the policy decision to vest the property in petroleum in DETI, to enable the Department to grant petroleum licences in these waters, would be considered a separate plan or programme for energy as defined by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004. The internal waters of Northern Ireland have not previously been available for petroleum licensing under either the Northern Ireland or UK offshore licensing regime.

Petroleum Production (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why the amendment to the Petroleum (Production) Act 1987, made in Regulation 2 (6) (i) of the Petroleum Production (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010, was deemed necessary; and whether any representatives from oil or gas companies made any representations to, or had any correspondence with, her Department regarding the Petroleum Production (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010, or the Hydrocarbons Licensing Directive Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 during the last five years, and to provide further details.

(AQW 8471/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Regulation 2 (6) (i) of the Petroleum Production (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 amends Clause 24 of Schedule 2 to the Petroleum Production Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1987. Schedule 2 to the 1987 Regulations sets out the model clauses for petroleum licences in Northern Ireland and Clause 24 relates to the confidentiality requirements of reports submitted to the Department by the licensee.

The primary purpose of the Hydrocarbons Licensing Directive Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 and the Petroleum Production (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 was to implement the Hydrocarbons Licensing Directive in Northern Ireland. Appropriate amendments for the purposes of the Directive were made to the Petroleum Production Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1987 but other amendments were also made to bring arrangements in Northern Ireland more closely into line with those in Great Britain. Clause 24 of the 1987 Regulations (reports to be treated as confidential) was amended to align the provision with arrangements in Great Britain under regulation 27 of The Petroleum Licensing (Exploration and Production) (Seaward and Landward Areas) Regulations 2004. The period provided for publication of data by the Department was reduced to 4 years from the date on

which data was due to be received by the Department rather than, as previously, 5 years from the date on which data was received by the Department.

Due to late implementation of the Directive in Northern Ireland, existing licensees were informed either that their licences would not be renewed if due to expire before the Regulations came into operation or that they would be revoked by the Regulations. Representations were made to the Department, and correspondence was received from, two of the existing licensees regarding the impact of the Regulations on their licences.

Overseas Visitors

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the number of overseas visitors; (ii) the number of overseas visitors to the island of Ireland; and (iii) the percentage of overseas visitors to the island of Ireland who have visited here, in each of the last seven years.

(AQW 8501/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The estimated number of overseas visitors (including visitors from Great Britain) to Northern Ireland, island of Ireland and the percentage of visitors to the island of Ireland who visited NI in each of the last seven years are detailed below.

	Overseas visitors to Northern Ireland (000s)	Overseas visitors to the island of Ireland (000s)	Percentage of overseas visitors to the island of Ireland who visited Northern Ireland
2004	1,733	7,746	22%
2005	1,701	8,114	21%
2006	1,702	8,725	20%
2007	1,785	9,070	20%
2008	1,709	8,688	20%
2009	1,443	7,636	19%
2010 ¹	1,418	6,700	21%

Source: Northern Ireland Tourist Board, Tourism Ireland

1 Preliminary estimates. Preliminary estimates for 2011 are scheduled for publication in April 2012.

Electricity and Gas Prices: Green Policies

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what is the estimated addition to the price of (i) electricity; and (ii) gas per kilowatt hour resulting from green taxes or policies.

(AQW 8513/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Responsibility for green policies is spread across a number of Departments given their different remits. Green taxes are a reserved matter and therefore the impact is assessed at a UK level by HMT. This answer is therefore limited to those policies impacting on DETI policy areas. Information is only available as additional cost per bill.

Currently, the Northern Ireland Renewable Obligation is the main mechanism for incentivising renewable electricity generation. It places an obligation of financing the policy on energy companies which is then passed onto the consumer through energy bills and currently represents approximately £12 to £15 on an average annual domestic electricity bill. It does not impact on gas bills. Other policies such as the Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme (due to end in 2013) and the NFFO/ROF add a further £11 to a bill.

Going forward, the Strategic Energy Framework estimates that the combined cost of renewable electricity installations, together with the cost of the grid investment necessary to meet the 40% target could be between £49 and £83 per household on an annual basis by 2020 at current prices. In addition, proposals for Electricity Market Reform (EMR), including the Carbon Price Floor, will also bring additional costs to consumers. The full impact of these policies is still being assessed.

Employment: People without Qualifications

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given that 41.6 percent of the working age population have no qualifications, what plans her Department has to create employment opportunities for this group; and how she will ensure that there is enough flexibility in the criteria for jobs, so that this group is not automatically excluded.

(AQW 8519/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The draft Northern Ireland Economic Strategy sets out how the Executive plans to grow a prosperous local economy by 2030. Higher levels of employment and prosperity, including within those groups with lower skills levels, will be key to reducing poverty levels and the delivery of the objectives of the Economic Strategy will be the Executive's collective responsibility.

Recognising the importance of job creation in tackling poverty, my Department has, as part of the Programme for Government and the NI Economic Strategy (NIES) committed to promote 25,000 new jobs by March 2015. The draft NIES identifies a range of commitments that aim to both rebuild the local economy by addressing the long-standing structural weaknesses that have constrained our economic growth, and rebalance the economy towards higher levels of private sector growth. These actions, which cut across all Departments, are expected to deliver job creation and growing employment levels in Northern Ireland.

As the recession has had a significant impact on the local labour market, the draft NIES also includes a number of measures, across all Departments, which aim to rebuild the local labour market in the short to medium term. These measures in particular, have the potential to greatly help the economically inactive, those that have recently being made unemployed and help provide opportunities for those employees with lower-skill sets. The rebuilding themes also recognise the important contribution the Social Economy sector makes to the NI Economy. As part of its measures to promote employment and strengthen employability, the Strategy seeks to promote the social economy and its contribution to economic growth.

Specific actions falling under the rebuilding themes include:

- Under Invest NI's job fund, promote 6,300 jobs in export focussed sectors by March 2015, with 4,000 jobs to be created by March 2014;
- Move 114,000 working age benefit clients into employment by March 2015 (DEL);
- Stimulate 1,150 new employment opportunities in rural areas under the Rural Development Fund by 2015 (DARD);
- Implement a Childcare Strategy to support new measures to reduce barriers to employment (OFMDFM);
- Implement the Social Investment Fund to tackle poverty, unemployment and physical deterioration in disadvantaged communities (OFMDFM);
- Increase the number of working age customers in reception of work-focused benefits to support them to move into work (DEL);
- Provide an Employer subsidy for businesses to recruit individuals who have been unemployed or economically inactive for a period of more than 13 weeks (DEL);
- Maximise the social benefits of investment through the inclusion of social clauses in all public procurement contracts for supplies, services and construction (DFP); and
- Offer a period of supported self-employment for those interested in running their own business (DEL).

Examples of specific rebalancing measures identified within the draft NIES, which will support those who are economically inactive and help those with low skills to up-skill, include:

- Incentivise employment of the long term unemployed through linking DEL's Steps to Work Programme to the Invest NI Jobs Fund;
- Agree and introduce an Executive strategy for young people who are NEETs (Not in Employment, Education or Training) by April 2012;
- Develop Strategic Employment Strategies for Belfast and Londonderry aimed at increasing employment and reducing economic inactivity;
- Promote 6300 jobs in local companies; 5900 jobs in inward investors and 6500 in new business starts by March 2015;
- Deliver 210,000 qualifications at levels 2, 3, 4 and above by March 2015; and,
- Develop a European Social Fund 2014-2020 programme aimed at enhancing employability and increasing the overall employment rate, in particular for those groups at a disadvantage in the labour market.

With regard to your second point, as I'm sure you can appreciate, it is for an individual business to set the recruitment criteria for any vacant post that they may have. The criteria will be based on the individual needs of that business to ensure it has the correct skills to help optimise its growth and development. It would, therefore, be inappropriate for Government to try and influence this process in any way. However, I can assure you that my Department and the Executive will continue to do what we can to help businesses to create a wide variety of jobs across various skills levels and ensure that our work force has the appropriate skills to find, secure and retain sustainable employment.

Postage and Printing Costs

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department, and its arm's-length bodies, give elected representatives the choice of receiving reports and all other correspondence by email to minimise postage and printing costs.

(AQW 8524/11-15)

Mrs Foster: With regard to reports, I refer the Member to the answer I gave in AQW 6082/09.

For correspondence my Department will provide electronic responses to correspondence from Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) when requested by them to do so.

Communication in relation to Ministerial Statements is carried out in accordance with the requirements of Assembly Standing Orders which require written copies of Oral Statements to be made available to each MLA.

Home Heating Oil: Retail Pump Sales

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what regulations govern the sale of home heating oil at retail pumps in petrol station forecourts.

(AQW 8542/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The regulations for controlling the sale of home heating oil through liquid fuel measuring instruments on petrol station forecourts are the same as for petrol/diesel pumps.

The applicable legislation is:-

- The Weights and Measures (Amendment) Act (NI) 2000
- The Weights and Measures (NI) Order 1981
- The Measuring Instruments (Liquid Fuel and Lubricants) Regulation 2006
- The Measuring Equipment (Liquid Fuel and Lubricants) Regulations 1998

- The Measuring Equipment (Liquid Fuel and Lubricants) (Use for Trade) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007
- The Price Marking Order (Northern Ireland) 2004.

Wind Turbines: Decommissioning Costs

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she has considered introducing legislation to require companies to pay into a bond to guarantee that the costs of decommissioning wind turbines will not be met by taxpayers or landowners, in the event of a company entering receivership.

(AQW 8556/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Planning permission requires that above ground structures are dismantled after 25 years from grid connection or if generation has ceased for a period of 6 months (unless a further consent has been granted). This is to ensure that the habitat is restored and the quality of the landscape maintained. The operator of the wind farm, which may in some cases be the landowner, is responsible for this. I understand that some operators do set aside funding for decommissioning purposes. This does not involve the taxpayer and is not an issue on which I would legislate.

As regards offshore renewable energy developments, my Department will shortly be consulting on a new Energy Bill. In order to meet international obligations with regard to safety and navigation and the protection of the marine environment, this Bill will include provisions for a decommissioning regime which would apply to the current Offshore Renewable Energy Leasing Round. This regime, which will be consistent with that in place in GB waters, will ensure that the companies responsible for offshore renewable energy projects are accountable for the costs of decommissioning at the end of the project's life or in the event of insolvency.

Hydraulic Fracturing: Climate Change

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 7750/11-15, and given her confirmation that the production of carbon emissions from fracking will have to be assessed in the context of the current and future energy supply mix, whether her Department intends to inform companies engaged in gas extraction of the quotas on the amount of gas they are permitted to extract before they initiate production, to ensure that their business cases remain viable.

(AQW 8558/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has no current plans to set quotas on the amount of gas that companies may extract in any future gas production projects. Please refer to the Answer to AQW 8559/11-15 for the context in which the greenhouse gas emissions associated with any future gas production in Northern Ireland will be considered.

Hydraulic Fracturing: Climate Change

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 7750/11-15, for his assessment of the percentage of shale gas reserves that should be exploited in Fermanagh to allow Northern Ireland to remain within its carbon budget; and how his Department intends to measure the carbon impact of shale gas extraction, given that the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has confirmed that the production of carbon emissions from fracking will have to be assessed in the context of the current and future energy supply mix.

(AQW 8559/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Northern Ireland does not have a separate carbon budget but is included within overall UK carbon budgets. However, the Northern Ireland Executive is committed to playing its part in the transition to a low carbon economy and the draft Programme for Government (2011-15) has set a non-statutory target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 35% below 1990 levels by 2025. Consideration of the carbon impact of any future production of shale gas will use the most appropriate

methods available when a development plan is submitted to the regulatory authorities, and verified using appropriate monitoring systems should such a development receive approval to proceed.

Hydraulic Fracturing: County Fermanagh

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department has made any assessment of how shale gas exploration could impact negatively on tourism.

(AQW 8565/11-15)

Mrs Foster: From previous experience, oil and gas exploration in Northern Ireland has had minimal or no negative effect on tourism. However, any application to drill an exploration well for shale gas, with associated hydraulic fracturing, would be subject to the full rigour of the Planning and Environmental Impact Assessment processes within which the tourism implications would be fully addressed through comprehensive consultation.

North/South Electricity Interconnector

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the impact that the proposed North-South electricity interconnector may have on reducing the cost of electricity.

(AQW 8572/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Transmission capacity constraints are estimated to cost consumers in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland some £18 million to £25 million per annum. A second interconnector will remove these costs and is expected to save Northern Ireland electricity consumers £7 million per annum.

North/South Electricity Interconnector

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions she has had with the Consumer Council in relation to the proposed North-South electricity interconnector.

(AQW 8573/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I have not held discussions with the Consumer Council in relation to the proposed electricity interconnector.

Invest NI: Business Park, Melmount Road, Strabane

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the development of the InvestNI Business Park, Melmount Road, Strabane; and what work is being undertaken to attract and secure prospective tenants to the Business Park.

(AQW 8576/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI has acquired 40 acres of land at Melmount Road for the purposes of developing a new business park to support economic development in the Strabane area.

The contract for the development works was awarded in December 2011 and the first phase of construction works is expected to complete during autumn this year.

Invest NI will actively market the business park to both foreign and indigenous investors. It is worth noting that the agency is currently in receipt of a number of company interests in respect of serviced sites within the park.

It is important to note, however, that the final decision on investment location rests solely with the investor.

Invest NI continues to engage proactively with Strabane Council in progressing this development.

Job Creation: North Antrim

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given that North Antrim had the fifth highest number of redundancies in the year ending 13 January 2012, what plans her Department has to create employment in the area.

(AQW 8588/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Between 1st April 2008 and 31st January 2012 my Department in conjunction with Invest NI has issued 522 offers of assistance to companies within the North Antrim Parliamentary Constituency area (PCA), generating almost £82 million of investment and promoting 438 new jobs. During this time some 476 new business starts were also assisted in the area.

As a direct response to the downturn, I also launched “The Jobs Fund” in April 2011 with a ring-fenced budget of £19m to support business owners to create new, sustainable jobs that will tackle our current levels of unemployment. To date, the uptake in North Antrim has been steady with 6 projects approved that will create 19 new jobs in the area.

The Jobs Fund, through its Neighbourhood Renewal Area (NRA) Business Start grant, has also issued offers of support to 3 individuals to start new businesses in North Antrim. In addition, a further 6 young entrepreneurs aged 16-24 have been offered support through the NEET Business Start Grant (aimed at young people Not in Employment, Education or Training).

At a local level Invest NI's North Eastern Regional Office, based in Ballymena, is also working closely with Councils in the North Antrim area to develop a range of new programmes targeted at locally focused businesses that have not traditionally been able to avail of Invest NI support. These programmes are submitted for funding under the Local Economic Development (LED) measure of the Sustainable Competitiveness Programme and seek to improve the capacity and capability of local businesses to grow and ultimately create new jobs.

Invest NI is also working with Councils in the North Antrim area to map key drivers of economic development and to develop, in partnership, new products and services that can impact on wider economic development and provide an environment where businesses can thrive and create new jobs. As a result of this engagement, Invest NI has developed, in partnership with other stakeholders, an initiative aimed at small independent retailers which has been piloted successfully in several Council areas including Ballymena. This type of activity is helping to create an environment where businesses are better placed to sustain existing jobs and create new jobs.

In September 2011, Invest NI in partnership with other stakeholder organisations in the North East, delivered / facilitated over 20 events in the North East aimed at SMEs and related stakeholder organisations. These events focused on the range of support available to SMEs in the region and were open to businesses and potential entrepreneurs to stimulate the growth of small and micro businesses and ultimately support new job creation in the area.

While Invest NI is not currently delivering a Business Start Programme, it has put in place appropriate arrangements to respond to business start enquiries to ensure potential entrepreneurs can access the relevant advice and support that they need. This activity is supporting the needs of potential entrepreneurs as they move into self employment and create further jobs as their businesses grow.

As you can see from the above, my Department and Invest NI are continuing to seek to maximise economic development opportunities in North Antrim and you can be assured that we will continue to help companies in the area cope with the effects of the downturn and build towards future success.

Business Start-up Programme: Tender Process

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how the tendering process for the Go For It programme was assessed; and who made the decision on the award of the tender.

(AQW 8624/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The award of the contract for the new Business Start Programme was a procurement decision carried out in line with public procurement guidelines.

Three tenders were received for the programme and these were assessed by a Tender Evaluation Panel which was made up of Invest NI personnel with direct programme management experience. In line with best practice in public procurement and to ensure fairness and transparency this tender panel was facilitated by the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD).

Anaerobic Digesters and Wind Turbines: Funding

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what funding or incentives her Department has in place for anaerobic digesters and wind turbines.

(AQW 8629/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Anaerobic digesters and wind turbines 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). DETI does not offer grants towards the generation of renewable electricity.

DETI recently consulted on proposals to provide financial support for a range of renewable heat installations, including anaerobic digesters, as part of a Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI). Whilst it is proposed that anaerobic digesters which receive ROCs for the generation of electricity will not be eligible to receive the heat incentive, 'heat only' systems will, however, receive RHI payments.

Natural Gas: Availability

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many households have had natural gas available to them, in each of the last five years, broken down by council area.

(AQW 8716/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The gas distribution companies, Phoenix Natural Gas (PNG) and firmus energy have provided the following information for each of the last five years.

PNG - PROPERTIES PASSED ('000S)¹ BY GAS PIPELINES IN THE GREATER GREAT BELFAST AND LARNE LICENSED AREA²

Licence District³	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Carrickfergus	11.2	11.4	11.7	12.2	12.4
Carryduff and Castlereagh	19.2	19.7	20.2	20.8	21.5
Duncrue	0.6	0.6	0.8	0.8	0.8
East Belfast	39.5	40.1	40.5	40.9	41.5
Harbour	0.3	0.4	0.6	0.8	0.9
Larne	5.8	6.2	6.4	7.1	7.6
Lisburn	19.6	20.5	21.4	22.9	24.0
Newtownabbey	24.3	24.9	26.0	26.8	27.8
Newtownards	11.7	13.0	14.7	16.3	17.4
North and West Belfast	68.9	70.7	72.2	74.0	75.3
North Down	28.0	28.8	29.2	30.3	31.4
South Belfast	29.2	29.9	30.7	30.9	31.2
Total:	258.2	266.3	274.4	283.8	291.9

- 1 PNG figures for 'Properties Passed' include both domestic and business properties.
- 2 All PNG figures listed are cumulative.
- 3 PNG do not hold data by District Council area but rather by defined districts within their licence area.

FIRMUS ENERGY – ESTIMATED DOMESTIC PROPERTIES PASSED⁴ BY GAS PIPELINES IN THE 10 TOWNS LICENSED AREA

District Council Area	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Antrim	300	2,000	3,000	4,000	4,600
Armagh	0	0	0	700	800
Ballymena	1,200	2,600	3,200	3,800	5,000
Ballymoney	500	1,100	1,500	1,600	1,600
Banbridge	0	1,100	1,600	1,800	1,800
Coleraine	1,100	1,800	2,200	2,600	3,500
Craigavon	600	2,700	4,800	6,600	8,500
Londonderry	3,600	6,300	8,700	10,700	13,000
Limavady	200	700	1,000	1,300	1,300
Newry & Mourne	600	1,200	1,900	2,000	2,600
Total	8,100	19,500	27,900	35,100	42,700

Estimated as at 30 September each year. All figures are cumulative.

Natural Gas: Uptake

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many households have availed of natural gas in each of the last five years, broken down by council area.

(AQW 8717/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The gas distribution companies, Phoenix Natural Gas (PNG) and firmus energy have provided the following information for each of the last five years.

PNG – PROPERTIES CONNECTED ('000S)¹ IN GREATER BELFAST AND LARNE LICENSED AREA²

Licence District¹	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Carrickfergus	4.9	5.1	5.3	5.6	6.0
Carryduff and Castlereagh	4.1	4.7	5.2	5.8	6.5
Duncrue	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.4	0.4
East Belfast	18.6	19.6	20.5	21.4	22.6
Harbour	0.2	0.2	0.5	0.7	0.7
Larne	2.6	2.8	2.9	3.2	3.5
Lisburn	8.0	8.7	9.4	10.4	11.2
Newtownabbey	9.7	10.5	11.2	11.9	12.9
Newtownards	4.0	4.5	4.9	5.6	6.4
North and West Belfast	40.3	42.2	44.1	46.0	48.3
North Down	10.5	11.5	12.4	13.3	14.7

Licence District ¹	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
South Belfast	11.6	12.6	13.8	14.4	15.2
Total:	114.7	122.6	130.7	138.8	148.5

- 1 The PNG data for 'Properties Connected' covers both domestic and business properties.
- 2 All PNG figures listed are cumulative.

FIRMUS ENERGY – DOMESTIC PROPERTIES CONNECTED IN THE 10 TOWNS LICENSED AREA

District Council Area	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Antrim	100	320	960	1320	1780
Armagh	0	0	0	20	130
Ballymena	160	230	370	660	1,210
Ballymoney	170	210	250	340	450
Banbridge	50	150	240	350	460
Coleraine	110	260	460	550	930
Craigavon	40	220	410	850	1,470
Londonderry	250	650	1,240	1,960	3,450
Limavady	40	80	140	250	340
Newry & Mourne	50	110	260	340	650
Total	970	2,230	4,330	6,640	10,870

All figures are cumulative.

Natural Gas: Uptake

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what percentage of households in each council area currently avail of natural gas.

(AQW 8718/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department does not hold this information in the detail necessary to provide a meaningful response.

Natural Gas: Availability

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what percentage of households currently have natural gas available to them.

(AQW 8719/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department does not hold this information in the detail necessary to provide a meaningful response.

Natural Gas: Prices

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her Department's assessment of the volatility of future gas prices compared with renewable heating sources.

(AQW 8720/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department is unable to comment on future natural gas prices and renewable heating sources such as biomass, as prices are driven by market forces, are subject to many variables, and are therefore outside the Department's control.

Invest NI: Funding in South Down

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much funding InvestNI has invested in businesses in the South Down area in each of the last ten years, broken down by the (i) type of business; and (ii) areas within South Down.
(AQW 8734/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As Invest NI was only established in 2002, the information contained in this answer relates to the 9 financial years 2002-03 to 2010-11.

Table 1 shows the amount of assistance offered by Invest NI in the South Down Parliamentary Constituency Area (PCA) between 2002-03 and 2010-11 broken down by type of business (industrial sector).

TABLE 1: INVEST NI ASSISTANCE OFFERED IN SOUTH DOWN PCA BY INDUSTRIAL SECTOR (2002-03 TO 2010-11)

Sector	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Business & Financial Services	1,955	19,876	180,672	142,755	68,820	52,488	70,797	51,893	147,112
Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals	14,250	-	10,126	80,119	41,828	20,000	-	74,700	15,585
Clothing & Textiles	1,554,320	38,675	303,905	-	1,056	-	-	25,200	1,000
Construction Services	-	100	1,568	74,558	97,985	71,492	16,400	264,950	204,381
Electrical, Electronic & Optical Equipment	-	8,000	-	91,037	4,400	-	-	1,000	12,900
External Delivery Organisations	-	100,000	14,729	-	-	-	5,000	-	-
Fabricated Metal & Metal Finishing	94,604	410,879	60,973	5,133	66,003	134,599	410,435	419,748	138,997
Food, Drink & Tobacco	478,804	31,646	103,852	165,799	135,804	119,183	115,630	573,106	157,853
Glass, Ceramic & Concrete Products	3,120	70,476	441,556	21,306	25,280	353,786	14,900	163,942	24,000
Non-Electrical Machinery	10,000	109,134	131,561	55,108	110,078	15,647	73,586	17,500	42,197
Other Manufacturing	34,175	42,310	16,824	3,673,183	21,000	58,881	8,167,198	278,872	37,847
Other Services	111,873	161,793	2,735,717	25,820	6,302	368,143	99,294	242,706	89,513
Paper Products, Printing & Publishing	5,360	939	945	4,100	48,386	14,903	-	5,000	-

Sector	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Rubber & Plastic products	26,500	2,700	849	-	25,000	39,184	5,000	28,584	20,075
Software & Computer Services	24,340	27,252	1,795	-	4,440	55,956	95,757	160,511	124,509
Transport Equipment	32,010	27,590	260,739	290,250	84,635	29,700	163,704	1,981,412	102,324
Wood Products	2,120	-	63,334	30,453	4,255	9,092	3,450	77,398	15,000
TOTAL	2,393,431	1,051,371	4,329,144	4,659,619	745,272	1,343,054	9,241,151	4,366,522	1,133,293

Table 2 shows the amount of assistance offered by Invest NI in the South Down PCA between 2002-03 and 2010-11 broken down by area (District Electoral Area (DEA)).

TABLE 2: INVEST NI ASSISTANCE OFFERED IN SOUTH DOWN PCA BY DEA (2002-03 TO 2010-11)

DEA	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Ballynahinch	66,450	87,446	38,872	-	1,056	99,184	29,800	142,017	67,302
Crotilieve	173,285	221,159	479,789	503,515	134,400	141,501	308,604	526,191	354,305
Downpatrick	142,110	108,227	169,374	78,558	129,586	253,645	172,016	402,126	90,621
Dromore	-	-	62,437	12,500	84,885	118	26,022	112,576	18,000
Knockiveagh	1,552,500	5,375	312,280	-	33,410	180,413	16,450	175,472	735
Newcastle	119,067	21,391	2,552,032	123,964	74,232	12,507	40,950	349,447	272,753
Rowallane	323,249	103,000	21,604	80,327	6,100	93,800	2,400	7,283	3,850
The Fews	1,820	232	1,304	408	96,880	72,079	82,783	749,305	163,916
The Mournes	14,950	504,541	691,452	3,860,347	184,723	489,807	8,562,126	1,915,355	163,579
TOTAL	2,393,431	1,051,371	4,329,144	4,659,619	745,272	1,343,054	9,241,151	4,379,772	1,135,061

Notes to Tables 1 & 2:

- 1 A further £26,149 of assistance offered cannot be split at Table 1 level.

- 2 A further £11,131 of assistance offered cannot be split at Table 2 level.
- 3 Sectors are based on the UK Standard Industrial Classifications..
- 4 DEAs are based on NI Statistics & Research Agency Central Postcode Directory.
- 5 Invest NI revises performance data on a regular basis to ensure that it reflects implemented projects; therefore, the data above may differ to previously published information.

In addition, Invest NI offered assistance of £816,800 during the period to locally-owned start up businesses through the Start A Business programme. This support is shown by DEA in Table 3 below.

TABLE 3: INVEST NI ASSISTANCE OFFERED THROUGH THE START A BUSINESS PROGRAMME IN SOUTH DOWN PCA BY DEA (2002-03 TO 2010-11)

DEA	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Ballynahinch	5,250	16,250	15,750	12,400	6,400	12,000	3,800	-	-
Crothlieve	42,250	32,000	55,250	34,100	16,400	21,600	11,800	-	-
Downpatrick	24,000	40,500	61,750	34,950	12,000	18,400	8,800	-	-
Dromore	1,750	4,500	3,750	2,800	400	400	1,200	-	-
Knockiveagh	3,250	11,750	5,000	8,100	7,600	4,800	3,400	-	-
Newcastle	18,500	24,500	39,250	24,150	12,600	13,000	12,200	-	-
Rowallane	5,750	3,750	12,000	5,050	800	2,800	1,200	-	-
The Fews	5,250	5,750	4,500	6,250	1,800	2,400	1,200	-	-
The Mournes	13,250	9,750	22,000	8,750	5,800	7,000	3,200	-	-
Total	119,250	148,750	219,250	136,550	63,800	82,400	46,800	-	-

NOTES:

- 1 Start a Business Programme was renamed as the Enterprise Development Programme during 2009-10, which offers guidance and support but does not offer financial assistance.

Natural Gas: Extension of Network to Ballycastle

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her Department's assessment of the possibility of extending the gas network to Ballycastle.

(AQW 8775/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Extending the natural gas network to new areas such as Ballycastle can only take place where it is economically viable to do so, and ultimately, will depend on the natural gas industry coming forward with specific proposals. The availability of suitable gas loads in Ballycastle is therefore an important factor for extension of the gas network, as would be the commitment of companies and public sector organisations in the area to connect to natural gas if it were to become available.

Nuclear Power: Local Facility

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether companies have contacted her Department expressing an interest in providing local nuclear power provision.

(AQW 8776/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I can confirm that no companies have approached my Department to express an interest in providing a nuclear power facility in Northern Ireland.

Broadband Services

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action has been taken to inform rural communities of the provision of high speed satellite broadband services since the contract was awarded in January 2012.

(AQW 8777/11-15)

Mrs Foster: On 6 January 2012, I announced the award of a contract to deliver high-speed satellite broadband services to Onwave Ltd. The contract ensures that everyone in Northern Ireland continues to have access to broadband services. Onwave delivers services in areas where, due to commercial and technical reasons, broadband cannot be accessed via telephone lines.

Onwave has an extensive marketing strategy to promote its services across Northern Ireland, which includes radio advertising and printed material. I understand that the company has also engaged in a series of meetings with local representatives and key stakeholders to explain the benefits of high-speed broadband.

My Department has developed a telecommunications Fact Sheet, which references all broadband technologies available in Northern Ireland. The Fact Sheet is currently being updated and will reflect the arrival of Onwave to the Northern Ireland market.

I will arrange for a copy of the revised Fact Sheet to issue to all Members and to be placed in the Assembly Library. The Fact Sheet will also be sent to key stakeholders across Northern Ireland and is available on the DETI website.

Invest NI: Use of Consultants

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the total cost for the consultants used by Invest NI over each of the last five years.

(AQW 8788/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

Type of Consultancy	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11
Economic Appraisals & Programme Evaluations	£618k	£679k	£888k	£772k	£530k

Type of Consultancy	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11
Sector and Economic Studies	£159k	£148k	£80k	£99k	£134k
Investment, Audit & Governance	£55k	£0k	£17k	£319k	£232k
IT Systems Consultancy	£72k	£96k	£211k	£86k	£208k
Others	£336k	£260k	£150k	£10k	£62k

Note that these figures include VAT

The above table provides a breakdown of the various categories of consultancy expenditure. A brief description of the major components is as follows

- “Economic Appraisals and Programme Evaluations” are an essential component in the decision to provide direct financial assistance and specialist programme advice to companies. These activities are conducted by technical and specialist external professional advisors who provide an independent assessment that seeks to demonstrate if a project should be supported or to evaluate if the actual outputs from a programme delivered the anticipated economic benefits. This category accounts for approximately 56% of consultancy spend.
- “Economic Reports and Sector Studies” provide an important input into informing and influencing the most effective support that can be developed for companies within given sectors. This category accounts for approximately 10% of consultancy spend.
- In some instances there is a requirement to engage external advisers to provide “Investment, Audit and Governance” services in relation to specific investments that require a more focused or specialist degree of monitoring. This category accounts for approximately 10% of consultancy spend.

Consequently due to the nature of Invest NI activities there is an ongoing requirement to engage external consultants. In particular the first three categories in the table which account for approximately 75% of the total expenditure on consultancy are essential to enable the organisation to fulfil its role whilst ensuring the highest level of governance standards.

These figures are as reported to DFP in the annual ‘Use of Consultants’ submission. The classification of consultants is in line with the definition under DFP guidance FD (DFP) 04/09 on the Use of External Consultants.

Enterprise Development Programme: Delivery Costs

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for a breakdown of the £6,720,266 programme delivery costs of the Enterprise Development Programme between December 2008 and October 2011.

(AQW 8789/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The £6,720,266 refers to programme delivery costs paid to the former contractor (Enterprise NI) for the Enterprise Development Programme and is broken down based on the two core elements of that programme:-

Start up (including pre start activity)	Growth
£5,972,004	£ 748,262

This figure should be viewed in the context of approximately £28.5m having been paid to Enterprise NI, by Invest NI, during the ten year period 2002 – 2012. These figures represent fees for programme delivery and do not include grant payments to start-up businesses.

Rugby World Cup 2023

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions she has had with her Ministerial colleagues, in the Executive or in the Dublin Government, about the possibility of the Rugby World Cup coming to the island of Ireland in 2023.

(AQW 8790/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I raised the potential of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland hosting the 2023 Rugby World Cup at a meeting with Ulster Rugby on 28th February 2012. I understand that the IRFU are investigating the option of tabling a bid for 2023 but are not yet in a position to provide an update on the viability of such a bid. I would be happy to make representations as appropriate on behalf of Ulster Rugby when further details of the bid are known.

Business Start-up Programme: Interested Parties

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many people have contacted Invest NI with a view to setting up a business, in each month since the beginning of the legal challenge to the proposed Business Start Up Scheme.

(AQW 8791/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI has responded to a total of 3,216 enquiries from 1 October 2011 to 29 February 2012, the breakdown per month is:-

October 2011	November 2011	December 2011	January 2012	February 2012
714	594	570	694	644

Business Start-up Programme: Advice and Support

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment since the beginning of the legal challenge to the proposed Invest NI Business Start Up Programme, and in relation to those seeking advice to start a business (i) to which other stakeholders or organisations they have been redirected; (ii) how many have been redirected to each of these stakeholders or organisations; and (iii) how many have been dealt with by Invest NI.

(AQW 8792/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI is proactively engaging with DEL, specifically their Steps to Work Programme (STW), and with Prince's Trust NI (PTNI). Where appropriate individuals have been signposted to organisations at a local level.

Invest NI has an active and on-going relationship with DEL (and its service providers) in relation to the Self Employment strand of its STW programme. Participants on the STW are routinely referred to Invest NI for advice and support in relation to starting their businesses.

Invest NI has responded directly to 587 Steps to Work enquiries, had 1:1 meetings with 78 STW participants, 244 STW participants have attended Invest NI's business clinics and 144 of these individuals have completed business plans. STW participants can access additional support through DEL's service providers.

Invest NI also has an agreement with Prince's Trust NI that all enquiries received from 18-24 years olds will be refer to the Trusts' Enterprise Programme through which they can receive additional support. Invest NI engages directly with these individuals through the Invest NI business clinics and 1:1 advisory sessions.

Invest NI has referred 109 individuals to PTNI.

As outlined at (ii)

Redundancies: Departmental Support

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the support her Department can provide when there are multiple redundancies in a concentrated area or in a constituency.

(AQW 8824/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In those unfortunate circumstances where job losses are announced by an Invest NI client company, Invest NI works closely with colleagues in the Department for Employment and Learning to do all possible to limit the impact of any redundancies and sustain as many jobs as possible in the short term. This may include the provision of specialist 'redundancy clinics' which offer a wide range of advice to those affected. Where possible, these clinics will seek to highlight any other suitable job vacancies in the area and provide affected staff with details of benefit entitlements. Invest NI's Regional Office teams also play a significant role in such clinics by providing one to one advice and guidance to those who may wish to consider self employment as an alternative.

Electricity: Renewable Sources

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what progress has been made on the targets for generating electricity from renewable sources.

(AQW 8829/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Programme for Government 2008 – 2011 target of 12% electricity consumption from renewable sources by 2012 has been exceeded. Over the twelve month rolling period to end January 2012, on average, 13.5% of electricity consumption was from renewable sources.

SeaGen Tidal Energy System

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the success and viability of the SeaGen tidal energy converter installed in Strangford Lough.

(AQW 8830/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The 1.2 MW SeaGen demonstration device, installed in Strangford Lough in 2008, has been successful on several different levels. It was the first grid connected commercial scale tidal energy system authorised as a UK power station and able to claim Renewable Obligation Certificates (ROCs) for its generation. It can generate 20 MW hrs per day on average and produces as much energy as a typical wind turbine of twice its electrical capacity (2.5MW). It has to date generated over 3 GW hrs of electricity to the NI Grid which is more than all the rest of the UK wave and tidal sector combined.

The device has been the subject of a very detailed environmental monitoring programme and in January 2012 an independent report concluded that it has had no significant or adverse impact on the marine environment. In light of this, Marine Current Turbines, SeaGen's owners have announced that they are seeking an extension to the current 5 year licence to generate in Strangford Lough, which expires in 2013. In February 2012 Siemens, one of the global leaders of renewable technologies announced its acquisition of MCT.

SeaGen Tidal Energy System

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many local homes are supplied with electricity generated by the SeaGen tidal energy converter installed in Strangford Lough.

(AQW 8831/11-15)

Mrs Foster: No local homes are supplied with electricity generated by Seagen, although the energy output from SeaGen would be sufficient to power around 1500 homes if it was bought by a domestic energy provider. However, SeaGen's generation is bought under a power purchase agreement by ESBI who in turn sell it to a commercial company.

SeaGen Tidal Energy System

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans she has to install more energy generators similar to the SeaGen tidal energy converter.

(AQW 8832/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The installation of more energy generators similar to SeaGen is a matter for commercial developers. As managers of the seabed, The Crown Estate, announced the first Northern Ireland Offshore Renewable Energy Leasing Round in December 2011 and it is seeking proposals from companies for offshore wind and tidal projects. As regards tidal developments, proposals are being sought for a range of projects from small scale (1MW to 10MW) to larger scale (10MW to 100MW) within an overall limit of 200MW for the Rathlin Island and Torr Head Strategic Area. Such projects may involve the use of a number of different types of tidal technology from a range of companies.

My Department encourages further development of tidal energy by incentivising renewable generators through the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation which provides a revenue stream for renewable electricity generated in the form of Renewable Obligation Certificates (ROCs).

Home Heating Oil Suppliers: Customer Charter

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the proposal by the Consumer Council to make domestic home heating oil companies sign up to a Customer Charter.

(AQW 8838/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I understand that the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland (CCNI) is working, in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Oil Federation (NIOF), to develop a voluntary Code of Practice which, it is proposed, will address service standard issues/redress, including payment methods, support, energy efficiency, complaints, customer care and safety. The aim is to introduce it over the next 3 – 6 months.

I welcome the collaborative approach between the CCNI and the NIOF on the development of this Customer Charter.

Tradelinks Programme: Bureaucracy

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps she will take to reduce bureaucracy in the TradeLinks programme which operates between Enterprise NI and the Border County Enterprise Boards in the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 8849/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has no role in the administrative oversight of the TradeLinks programme or its internal processes. Enterprise Northern Ireland delivers TradeLinks II under the terms of an Interreg IVA letter of offer from the Special EU Programmes Body.

HCL BPO Services

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she had any discussions with HCL BPO Services NI prior to its decision to shed 255 jobs in Northern Ireland; and whether she was aware prior to the announcement that it was creating 220 jobs in Kilkenny.

(AQW 8852/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I have met with senior representatives from HCL BPO Services over recent months and throughout our discussions have sought to retain and sustain as many jobs as possible for Northern Ireland. HCL's decision to retain a significant presence in Northern Ireland and to continue to invest in their operation here is to be welcomed. These job losses are extremely regrettable but I have been informed that this decision was not taken lightly and is as a result of wider commercial circumstances and unconnected to the announcement in Kilkenny. I have received assurances from HCL's senior management team that any jobs planned for Kilkenny are from clients based in the ROI and are to meet client requirements to deliver services in the Republic of Ireland.

Trade Union: Secondment

Mr McCallister asked Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the number of (a) full-time; and (b) part-time staff who are currently on secondment from her Department, or its arm's length bodies, to each recognised trade union; (ii) the salary scale for each secondee; and (iii) the length of each secondment to date.

(AQW 8857/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department and its arms length bodies currently have (i) (a) one full-time member of staff and (b) one part-time member of staff on secondment to a recognised trade union. (ii) The salary scales for the two secondees are £18,038 to £22,180 and £21,392 to £23,250. (iii) The length of the two secondments to date is 3 years 3 months and 2 years 10 months.

Invest NI: Stakeholder Perceptions

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether InvestNI commissioned Ipsos Mori to undertake market research into stakeholder perceptions of InvestNI in 2010/11; and when these results will be made public.

(AQW 8859/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Aside from dealing with businesses and client companies, Invest NI also engages with a wide range of stakeholders including elected representatives, business organisations and the media, financial and economic institutions and seeks feedback on its performance, communication and engagement with them.

In February 2011, Invest Northern Ireland (Invest NI) commissioned Ipsos MORI, an independent market research organisation, to conduct research and seek the views of a range of representatives from local business organisations, the media, financial and economic institutions and elected representatives.

Whilst the survey covered a broad range of stakeholders, with a diverse range of, sometimes competing, interests, it is encouraging that knowledge of Invest NI and its remit among its stakeholders is high and impressions of the organisation are generally positive. Opinions on Invest NI were considered to have improved over year prior to the report, despite the difficult economic climate.

Relationships with those stakeholders with whom Invest NI has the most engagement are clearly stronger than with the wider stakeholder group. This is not surprising and even inevitable, and I am aware that the Chief Executive and leadership team continually strive to improve relationships with the wider stakeholder group.

Ferry Services: Prices

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 8024/11-15 what action her Department is taking to address the Consumer Council's report of December 2011 which recommended that the Executive, in conjunction with the Scottish Executive and the Department of Transport should examine the potential for reducing the cost to consumers of Irish Sea ferry services.

(AQW 8944/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The development and operation of ferry links, and the fares the operators charge, are entirely matters for commercial decision by individual sea carriers and the Northern Ireland and Great Britain ports. My Department has not therefore discussed the Consumer Council report, "Ferry Travel - A Consumer Council report on the perceptions and experiences of ferry passengers in Northern Ireland", with the Scottish Executive or the Department for Transport.

Orange Events: NITB Funding

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the funding provided by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and her Department to the (i) Twelfth of July Celebrations; (ii)

13th July Royal Black Preceptory Sham Fight in Scarva; and (iii) Royal Black Preceptory celebrations in August, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8982/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board has not received any request for funding from the Orange Order or the Royal Black Preceptory in the last five years. The current Tourism Events Fund closed on the 7 October 2011. The NITB hopes to open its 2013/14 Tourism Event Fund in autumn 2012.

For six years the NITB has worked closely with the Orange Order in developing the tourism flagship programme.

Tourism: Grants in North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the total amount paid out in grants for tourism related projects in the North Down constituency in each of the last five years.

(AQW 9050/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) has paid out a total of £38,688 in grants for three tourism related projects in the North Down constituency over the last five years:

- 2010-2011, £21,000 grant to North Down and Ards Borough Council's to develop an Ulster Scots Trail and undertake an Ulster Scots Names Project.
- 2011-2012, £10,386 grant to North Down Borough Council to enhance the interpretation and landscaping from Bangor Abbey to North Down Museum on the St. Patrick's Trail.
- 2011-2012 £7,302 grant to North Down Borough Council to install two large bespoke totem information panels at North Down Museum and Bangor Abbey on the St. Patrick's Trail.
- In addition, NITB have issued 2 Letters of Offer to North Down Borough Council for two projects in the 2012 – 2013 period:
 - £11,891 grant to enhance the visitor facilities at Groomsport village which is one of the key stop off points within North Down along the Mourne Coastal Route.
 - £28,232 grant to upgrade the exhibitions and the overall visitor experience in North Down Museum.

An application has been received under the open call TDS 2011-13 from the North Down constituency. This project is currently being scored.

'Our time, Our Place': Sporting Organisations

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if and when, she met, or plans to meet, with (i) the Irish Football Association; (ii) the GAA; and (iii) Ulster Rugby to discuss the input they could have into 'Our time, Our Place'.

(AQW 9068/11-15)

Mrs Foster: NITB officials and I met with Ulster Rugby on 28th February 2012 to further understand Ulster Rugby's role in developing the tourism product in Northern Ireland and in driving civic pride amongst the population of Northern Ireland. NITB has also contacted the Irish Football Association and the GAA, to arrange further meetings with the same objectives. In addition NITB continues to work closely with and regularly meet the European Tour to understand the role golf and the Irish Open can play in promoting Northern Ireland in 2012.

Department of the Environment

Hydraulic Fracturing: Environmental Impact

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment what (i) discussions; (ii) investigations; and (iii) assessments on the environmental impact of fracking have taken place (a) within his Department; (b) with experts and specialists; and (c) with other Governments or administrations.

(AQW 5956/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I am fully aware of that there are widespread concerns in relation to the process of hydraulic fracturing. While no planning applications have been received to date it is anticipated Tamboran Resources will submit applications possibly as early as next year.

In the interim the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is continuing to supplement its knowledge of the process through reviewing emerging research, studying case studies from other parts of the world and liaising with counterparts in other Environment Agencies in Britain and Ireland, and other countries where fracking is currently proposed or taking place.

NIEA met with the Republic of Ireland's Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in Dublin, on the 17 January 2012. The purpose of the meeting was to establish formal lines of communication to enable transboundary issues regarding the current proposals to carry out a hydraulic fracturing operation in the Lough Allen Basin, which is within both Northern Ireland's and the RoI's jurisdictions, to be discussed. The EPA welcomed the discussions and stated their commitment to ensuring a close working relationship between both Agencies going forward. The next meeting between the Agencies will take place in March, in Belfast. I will raise this issue with Minister Hogan at an NSMC Environment Sectoral Meeting on 2 March 2012.

In addition, at a cross Departmental level, officials from DOE (Planning, NIEA), and DETI (Health and Safety Executive, Geological Survey) are meeting to discuss the hydraulic fracturing process and the likely Departmental responses to future proposals. The scope of these meetings has widened to involve officials from corresponding Departments in the Republic of Ireland. To date this grouping has met twice; in November 2011 and again in early February 2012.

Recently I met with representatives of Tamboran Resources and conveyed the imperative that the company ensures it complies with all planning and environmental requirements. Tamboran have accepted the need for such assessments and to liaise with both Strategic Planning Division and NIEA in scoping the content of an Environmental Statement if the issue of fracking moves forward.

I will ensure that at both Ministerial and official level liaison with counterparts in the RoI will continue to allow a better understanding of the environmental risks resulting from this process for the mutual benefit of both jurisdictions as the current area of exploration straddles both sides of the border.

I am also further assessing what environmental requirements are needed in advance of any future planning application and in relation to any future exploratory drilling.

Civil Service: Posts

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of the Environment how many Civil Service posts existed in his Department at (i) Administrative Assistant; (ii) Administrative Officer; (iii) Executive Officer 2; (iv) Executive Officer 1; (v) Staff Officer; (vi) Deputy Principal; (vii) Grade 7; and (viii) Grade 6 levels, at the beginning of (a) 2007; and (b) 2012, broken down by local Council area.

(AQW 7800/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

- 1 Details of Northern Ireland Civil Service staff in post in DOE at the beginning of 2007 broken down by local council area and analogous grades are as follows:

STAFF IN POST - JANUARY 2007

District Council Area	Grade 6/7	DP	SO	EOI/E02	A0	AA	Total
Ards	-	-	1	8	28	-	37
Armagh	-	-	2	7	17	2	28
Ballymena	6	9	18	38	37	12	120
Belfast	97	207	242	301	244	78	1169
Carrickfergus	-	-	-	1	1	-	2
Castlereagh	-	-	1	3	-	1	5
Coleraine	7	14	28	64	209	82	404
Cookstown	-	-	-	4	23	-	27
Craigavon	5	12	26	39	36	19	137
Derry	4	5	12	19	31	5	76
Down	5	7	17	33	35	15	112
Dungannon	-	1	2	3	1	-	7
Fermanagh	-	3	9	14	33	5	64
Larne	-	-	1	4	13	-	18
Limavady	-	-	1	2	4	-	7
Lisburn	10	19	74	80	36	10	228
Magherafelt	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
Newry & Mourne	-	-	-	8	12	1	21
Newtownabbey	-	-	-	4	23	-	27
North Down	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
Omagh	5	9	20	26	32	14	106
Total	139	286	455	659	815	244	2598

- In addition to the staff in post details provided DOE had 220 vacancies at the beginning of 2007. A breakdown of these vacancies by local council is not available.
- Details of Northern Ireland Civil Service staff in post at the beginning of 2012 broken down by local council area are as follows:

STAFF IN POST - JANUARY 2012

District Council Area	Grade 6	Grade 7	DP	SO	EOI	E02	A0	AA	Total
Ards	-	-	-	1	7	-	42	-	50
Armagh	-	-	-	2	3	1	26	1	33
Ballymena	1	2	9	20	16	4	36	5	93
Belfast	14	82	228	259	153	98	214	31	1079

District Council Area	Grade 6	Grade 7	DP	SO	E01	E02	A0	AA	Total
Carrickfergus	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	2
Castlereagh	-	-	-	-	4	-	-	1	5
Coleraine	2	8	15	31	28	41	224	78	427
Cookstown	-	-	-	1	3	-	27	-	31
Craigavon	-	3	8	27	20	6	38	7	109
Derry	-	2	5	15	14	4	32	2	74
Down	-	2	7	20	15	4	33	7	88
Dungannon	-	-	-	4	4	-	2	1	11
Fermanagh	-	-	3	8	12	2	30	2	57
Larne	-	-	-	1	2	-	20	-	23
Limavady	-	-	-	-	3	-	4	-	7
Lisburn	1	6	30	75	68	7	48	9	244
Magherafelt	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Newry & Mourne	-	-	-	1	6	-	22	1	30
Newtownabbey	-	-	-	1	3	-	29	-	33
North Down	-	-	-	1	1	-	1	-	3
Omagh	1	4	7	22	7	6	35	5	87
Total	19	109	312	490	370	173	864	150	2487

4 Details of related vacancies in DOE at the beginning of 2012 broken down by local council area are as follows:

VACANCIES – JANUARY 2012

District Council Area	Grade 6/7	DP	SO	E01/E02	A0	AA	Total
Ards	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
Armagh	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ballymena	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
Belfast	4	12	22	20	8	3	69
Carrickfergus	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Castlereagh	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Coleraine	-	2	5	7	2	1	17
Cookstown	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Craigavon	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Derry	-	-	-	6	-	-	6
Down	-	-	1	-	.5	-	1.5

District Council Area	Grade 6/7	DP	SO	E01/E02	A0	AA	Total
Dungannon	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fermanagh	-	-	-	-	.5	-	05
Larne	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Limavady	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lisburn	2		4.4	-	1		7.4
Magherafelt	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Newry & Mourne	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Newtownabbey	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
North Down	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Omagh	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	6	14	32.4	33	14	4	103.4

Vehicle Tax: Roadside Checks

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of the Environment how many people were caught without a valid tax disc in 2011, as a result of mobile roadside checks, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 8330/11-15)

Mr Attwood: DVA operates two forms of roadside checks for vehicles being used without valid tax discs. Reports of unlicensed vehicles are received from vehicles equipped with automatic number plate reading (ANPR) camera equipment and from VEAS, the company employed under a UK-wide contract to provide wheelclamping services.

Unfortunately the Agency is unable to provide a breakdown of detections by constituency because records are stored in the IT system against individual vehicle registration marks and places of detection are not stored in a way that would facilitate the production of relevant figures. However, the total number of vehicles detected as a result of mobile roadside checks in 2011 was 23,776.

Postage and Printing Costs

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department, and its arm's-length bodies, give elected representatives the choice of receiving reports and all other correspondence by email to minimise postage and printing costs.

(AQW 8424/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In line with good practice and sustainable development, my Department and its arms length bodies issues documents, where practical, either in electronic format or alternatively provides details of the relevant web link / address.

Where there is a statutory requirement for a document to be laid before the Assembly, where possible, these are hand delivered in bulk to Parliament Buildings for distribution to members' pigeon holes reducing the distribution costs.

Correspondence from elected representatives is normally responded to in the same format as used by the elected representative.

Equality Impact Assessments and Public Consultations: DOE Spend

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how much his Department has spent on (i) Equality Impact Assessments; and (ii) public consultations in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8429/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The table below provides details of the amounts the Department has spent on printing, advertising and postage costs associated with public consultations in each of the last three years (2008/09 to 2010/11).

Business Area	2008/09 £	2009/10 £	2010/11 £
Department (excluding agencies)	28,922	49,893	102,202
Planning Service	2,822	65,965	939
DVA	180	180	-
Total	31,924	116,038	103,141

As there are no specific account codes for 'Equality Impact Assessments' or 'public consultation' it is not possible to be definitive about the level of expenditure that may have been incurred for each of these activities. However, in attempt to answer this AQW, figures have been extracted based on a review of a number of analysis codes, which in the main relate to the consultation process.

The increase of £52,309 in the Department's spend (excluding agencies), from 2009/10 to 2010/11, mainly reflects the public consultation costs of a number of road safety activities covering Graduated Driver Licensing, Signs and Warning Lights on school buses and the Goods Vehicle (Licensing of Operators) Act NI 2010 – Licensing of Operators and Enforcement powers. The increase of £63,143 in Planning Service from 2008/09 to 2009/10 is mainly due to the engagement of consultants to assist with the stakeholder consultation exercise conducted on the Reform of the NI Planning System.

Retail Planning Policy

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment what plans his Department has to introduce a planning policy to encourage new businesses to locate in town centres.

(AQW 8526/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I wish to progress retail planning policy by focusing on where is best to grow and develop retailing in the future. As a first step, I will soon be announcing that weight shall be given to draft PPS 5 on 'Retailing, Town Centres and Commercial Leisure Developments' which seeks to sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of town centres in a manner consistent with achieving the strategic objectives of the Regional Development Strategy 2025.

Following this it is my intention to proceed with work on finalising a fit for purpose retail planning policy as quickly as possible. To this end I will be initiating a policy 'conversation' among all key stakeholders on the future of our city and town centres. This will involve a wide ranging debate on all matters relating to the vitality and viability of city / town centres.

Revised PPS 4 published in November 2010 includes planning policy for economic development, including office use, and encourages such development in city and town centres.

Cyclists: Safety from Lorries

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what plans his Department has for safety devices to be fitted on lorries to give greater protection to cyclists.

(AQW 8527/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department is aware of the difficulties faced by cyclists in heavy and fast moving traffic and of the difficulties that lorry drivers experience in detecting cyclists when in close proximity. The risk of “blind spots” in driver’s vision is therefore an issue which the Department has been keen to address.

In November 2009, the Department amended the Motor Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations (NI) 1999 to implement EC Directive 2007/38/EC on the retrofitting of mirrors in heavy goods vehicles which requires goods vehicles over 3.5 tonnes gross weight, and first used after 1 January 2000, to be retrofitted with improved ‘wide angle’ and ‘close proximity’ mirrors on the passenger side. These additional mirrors increase the driver’s field of vision and reduce “blind spots”, thus giving HGV drivers improved vision of cyclists and other road users.

Construction and Use Regulations also require the fitment of protective side guards to the majority of heavy goods vehicles. These are intended to prevent cyclists and other vulnerable road users slipping under the front and rear wheels of such vehicles.

You will wish to note that the Department is currently developing a new public information campaign on awareness of blind spots on heavy goods vehicles. This campaign is due to launch in the next few weeks and should be of benefit to all road users, including cyclists. The Department is monitoring the occurrence of accidents to determine the need for further measures.

Cyclists and Pedestrians: Road Safety

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what plans his Department has to increase awareness amongst drivers of the road safety issues faced by cyclists and pedestrians.

(AQW 8528/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The DOE has a statutory duty to promote road safety. One of the ways it raises awareness of road safety issues is through the Department’s road safety advertising campaigns.

Two road-user groups, cyclists and pedestrians, are particularly vulnerable and as such the Department has recently taken action to increase awareness amongst all road users, including drivers, of the risks they face on the road.

In October 2011 the Department launched the ‘Be Cycle Aware’ campaign, employing radio and bus rear advertising, in order to remind drivers and cyclists on the road to pay attention when sharing the road.

A radio advert targets drivers as they travel in the car during daytime hours when they would be expected to share the road with cyclists.

A second radio advert and bus rear advertising targets cyclists, reminding them of their vulnerability and the need to pay attention and stay safe on the roads.

This activity is in line with Action Measure 124 of the Road Safety Strategy 2020 - “We will give consideration to measures that improve the safety of cyclists; including what cyclists can do to keep themselves safe and what other road users can do”.

Pedestrian casualties are of particular concern and as such the Department is currently developing a new campaign that will raise awareness of pedestrians amongst drivers and will also urge pedestrians to be more aware of drivers.

Initially, this will be a television campaign, strongly supported by press and online activity. All messages in the new pedestrian campaign will link to the relevant advice in the Highway Code. The campaign is due to launch in the coming months.

This activity addresses many of the elements as outlined in action measures 125, 126, 127 and 129 of the Road Safety Strategy 2020.

Currently all road users are provided with detailed guidance through the current edition of the Highway Code which contains rules, information and advice that helps prepare them for the demands of today’s

roads. Advice on how drivers should treat vulnerable road users, including cyclists and pedestrians, with extra care and attention is covered specifically by Rules 204 to 218 of the Code.

Cyclists: Cross-departmental Policy

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what consideration he has given to establishing a cross-departmental group to co-ordinate a policy in relation to cyclists.

(AQW 8529/11-15)

Mr Attwood: DRD has responsibility for sustainable transport, and therefore takes the lead on encouraging cycling as a form of transport.

The 2007 NI Cycling Strategy Report suggested that there was an opportunity to integrate cycling and walking into one sustainable transport forum. This developed into an Active Travel Forum which was established in March 2010, a cross Departmental body chaired by DRD that includes a representative from DOE, as well as from DHSSPS, DE and DOJ.

Travelwise, Northern Ireland's Safer Routes to Schools (SRS), is an initiative between the DRD and the Department of Education (DE) with input from a number of other partners, including the DOE. The initiative encourages parents, children and teachers to use sustainable transport, which includes cycling, for their journey to and from school.

Under Article 52 of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 DOE has a statutory duty to promote road safety and one of the ways the Department does this is through the provision of the Cycling Proficiency Scheme (CPS). The Department's interest in providing cycle training to primary school children is as a road safety improvement measure.

In October 2011 the Department launched the 'Be Cycle Aware' campaign, employing radio and bus rear advertising, in order to remind drivers and cyclists on the road to pay attention when sharing the road. A radio advert targets drivers as they travel in the car during daytime hours when they would be expected to share the road with cyclists. A second radio advert and bus rear advertising targets cyclists, reminding them of their vulnerability and the need to pay attention and stay safe on the roads.

As indicated in this answer, there are therefore a number of Departments working on cycle matters, and a number of groups to coordinate this work.

Enforcement Cases: Lisburn

Mr Craig asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 6634/11-15, how many of the enforcement cases in the Lisburn area were resolved within (i) one year; (ii) two years; and (iii) three years or more.

(AQW 8577/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department holds data on the length of time taken to deal with each enforcement case and separates this information into four categories as follows: those closed within 0 -1 year; 1- 2 years; 2 – 3 years; and finally those 3 years and over.

The table on the following page details those of files closed in Lisburn district for each of the past two complete financial years and that of the current financial year to date. The table also indicates the length of time taken to secure a closure in those cases.

	Belfast Area 1/4/09 to 31/3/10 Lisburn	Belfast Area 1/4/10 to 31/3/11 Lisburn	Belfast Area 1/4/11 to date 28/2/12 Lisburn
0-1 yr	79	160	44
1-2yrs	50	28	35
2-3yrs	31	18	19

	Belfast Area 1/4/09 to 31/3/10 Lisburn	Belfast Area 1/4/10 to 31/3/11 Lisburn	Belfast Area 1/4/11 to date 28/2/12 Lisburn
3+yrs	38	37	83
	198	243	181

Hydraulic Fracturing: Planning Applications

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment (i) whether his Department has adequate resources and expertise to assess planning applications which include the process of hydraulic fracturing, given that such planning applications have never been assessed in Northern Ireland; and (ii) whether his Department has the capacity to assess an Environmental Impact Assessment submitted by an applicant in relation to hydraulic fracturing.

(AQW 8589/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As I have previously stated I am fully aware that there are widespread concerns in relation to the process of hydraulic fracturing. While no planning applications have been received to date it is anticipated Tamboran Resources will submit applications possibly as early as next year. A full and proper Environmental Impact Statement will form the basis of the Departments determination of any application and I am confident my officials in Strategic Planning Division assisted by a range of consultees will be able to properly assess the proposal and supporting information.

One of the key consultees will be the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). In the interim the NIEA is continuing to supplement its knowledge of the process through reviewing emerging research, studying case studies from other parts of the world and liaising with counterparts in other Environment Agencies in Britain and Ireland, and other countries where fracking is currently proposed or taking place. I will of course, take and acquire any specialist advice needed to make a determination of a planning application.

NIEA met with the Republic of Ireland's Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in Dublin, on the 17 January 2012. The purpose of the meeting was to establish formal lines of communication to enable transboundary issues regarding the current proposals to carry out a hydraulic fracturing operation in the Lough Allen Basin, which is within both Northern Ireland's and the RoI's jurisdictions, to be discussed. The EPA welcomed the discussions and stated their commitment to ensuring a close working relationship between both Agencies going forward. The next meeting between the Agencies will take place in March, in Belfast.

In addition, at a cross Departmental level, officials from DOE (Planning, NIEA), and DETI (Health and Safety Executive, Geological Survey) are meeting to discuss the hydraulic fracturing process and the likely Departmental responses to future proposals. The scope of these meetings has widened to involve officials from corresponding Departments in the Republic of Ireland. To date this grouping has met twice; in November 2011 and again in early February 2012.

Recently I met with representatives of Tamboran Resources and made it clear to that I expect the most rigorous Environmental Impact Assessment in relation to this matter. Tamboran have accepted the need for such assessments and to liaise with both Strategic Planning Division and NIEA in scoping the content of the required Environmental Statement. Such a statement will form the basis of the Departments determination of relevant matters and it must take account of all potential impacts on the environment and public health.

I will ensure that at both Ministerial and official level liaison with counterparts in the RoI will continue to allow a better understanding of the environmental risks resulting from this process for the mutual benefit of both jurisdictions as the current area of exploration straddles both sides of the border.

Local Government Reform: Update

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on when local government reform will be implemented.

(AQW 8590/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As the Minister responsible for implementation of the local government reform programme, I shall manage reform in line with the 2015 timetable proposed in the draft Programme for Government 2011-15.

I am currently establishing the implementation structures required to help manage and integrate the work needed to bring about the operational delivery of the programme. This includes a Regional Transition Committee, which I will chair, to provide the high level political leadership necessary to drive implementation forward. Its membership will include the Chairs of the 11 Voluntary Transition Committees, which are to be restored by the end of this month to enable convergence work to commence in each of the council groupings.

I am also taking forward the programme of legislation required to give effect to local government reorganisation. There are two main pieces of legislation, the first of which is the draft Local Government (Boundaries) Order (NI) 2012, which has recently been agreed by the Executive and will be laid before the Assembly in the near future. The second is the Local Government (Reorganisation) Bill which, subject to the Executive's agreement, I intend to introduce during the autumn session to give effect to the Executive's decisions on the future shape of local government.

Rose Energy: Glenavy Incinerator

Mr Frew asked the Minister of the Environment when a decision on Rose Energy's proposal for an incinerator at Glenavy will be announced.

(AQW 8612/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The former Minister's announcement of August 2010 was the subject of judicial review proceedings. Lord Justice McCloskey adjourned the judicial review proceedings on 2 March 2011 on the basis that the application process had not been completed.

The applications are now in the final stage of consideration. The files on this case containing a report and recommendation will be forwarded to me within the next few weeks.

The Department will make a recommendation to me on whether to proceed by way of a NOP to approve or refuse the applications or by way of a Public Inquiry.

Built Heritage: Revenue Generated

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment how much revenue has been generated by Built Heritage in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8618/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Revenue generated within the Northern Ireland Environment Agency from its Built Heritage in each of the last five full financial years is as follows:

Year	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11
Admission to historic monuments in state care, retail and book sales, educational tours, wedding and other bookings, commercial filming, photography and operation of the ferry to Devenish.	£242,667	£305,593	£282,969	£250,709	£243,881
Total	£1,346,827				

Revenue generated from the Built Heritage for 2011-12 is not yet available though admission charges alone have already exceeded £250,000.

My Department has no access to figures for revenue generated by others in the Built Heritage sector such as the National Trust.

Built Heritage: Investment

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment how much Built Heritage has invested in (i) private homes; (ii) commercial premises; and (iii) public buildings in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8619/11-15)

Mr Attwood: NIEA compiles information based on the following categories - Church Grant; District Council Grant; National Trust Grant, and Private Grant. I have provided, on the attached table, a breakdown of grant-aid disbursed in these categories for each of the last 5 financial years. Figures are not yet available for the 2011/12 financial year.

It is not possible to break this information down into 'commercial premises' as this is not a specific category for grant-aid; large commercial organisations are not eligible for grant-aid, as is the case with 'public buildings'.

Financial Year	Church Grant	District Council Grant	National Trust Grant	Private Grant	Total
2006/07	£295,160	£83,240	£109,080	£1,092,394	£1,579,874
2007/08	£392,827	£173,886	£291,156	£1,500,359	£2,358,228
2008/09	£689,740	£639,933	£93,534	£2,672,257	£4,095,464
2009/10	£483,804	£258,189	£127,675	£2,457,184	£3,326,852
2010/11	£963,210	£510,546	£10,220	£2,291,795	£3,775,771

Anaerobic Digesters and Wind Turbines: Funding

Mr Frew asked the Minister of the Environment what funding or incentives his Department has in place for anaerobic digesters and wind turbines.

(AQW 8630/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Under the Rethink Waste Programme the Department provides capital and revenue funding to encourage diversion of waste from landfill and to boost recycling. My Department does not specifically provide funding or incentives for provision of renewable energy infrastructure projects such as anaerobic digesters or wind turbines. However, I understand that you have also tabled this question to my Ministerial colleagues in both DARD and DETI and they will therefore confirm the position of their respective Departments in relation to funding for renewable energy projects.

Driver and Vehicle Agency: Temporary Contracts

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment (i) how many of the staff at the Driver and Vehicle Agency headquarters, Coleraine, are employed on temporary contracts; and (ii) for how long each member of staff has been employed on a temporary contract.

(AQW 8635/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Table 1 attached provides details on the four staff employed on temporary contracts at the Driver and Vehicle Agency Headquarters, Coleraine.

In addition to these temporary staff twenty-one agency workers are engaged at the Driver and Vehicle Agency Headquarters, Coleraine, through a Recruitment Agency. Details on these are provided at Table 2.

In the main these casual staff and agency workers are used to cover staff absences such as maternity leave and peaks in demand.

You will note that four of the agency workers have exceeded the normal 51 week limit set by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). Flexibility on the 51 week rule has been approved by DFP. This is to allow for completion of a casual recruitment competition necessary to provide continuity in relation to the Agency's responsibilities to conduct Automatic Number Plate checks on behalf of the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, Swansea. The competition is expected to be finalised by May 2012.

The typical cost of employing a casual member of staff at DVA Headquarters Coleraine is £1,400 per calendar month. During the month of January 2012 the cost of agency workers engaged at the Driver and Vehicle Agency Headquarters, Coleraine was circa £25,000.

TABLE 1: CASUAL STAFF EMPLOYED DIRECTLY BY THE DEPARTMENT ON BEHALF OF DVA

Duration of Engagement to Date (Weeks)	Number of Casual Staff
Commenced 27/2/2012	1
3	2
7	1
Total	4

TABLE 2: AGENCY WORKERS ENGAGED THROUGH A RECRUITMENT AGENCY

Duration of Engagement to Date (Weeks)	Number of Agency Workers
Commenced 27/2/2012	1
2	1
3	1
4	1
5	1
8	1
10	1
15	1
16	1
18	1
20	2
21	1
23	1
38	1
39	2
58	1
59	2
60	1
Total	21

Landfill Tax: Beneficiaries

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the beneficiaries of landfill tax in each council area in the last 12 months.

(AQW 8636/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Landfill Tax is a reserved matter and is administered by HMRC on behalf of the Treasury.

All of the revenue that is raised through landfill tax in Northern Ireland goes to the UK Exchequer. Since 2003/04, as a Barnett consequential, Northern Ireland has received an allocation from the landfill tax. However, there is no direct link between the area in which the revenue is raised and where it is spent. The use of all funding that is allocated through the Barnett formula is a matter for the Executive.

Some further monies raised through landfill taxes are returned to Northern Ireland through the Landfill Communities Fund.

The Landfill Communities Fund (formerly the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme) enables landfill site operators to claim tax credit for contributions they make to approved environmental bodies for spending on projects that benefit the environment. The environmental bodies are those enrolled by ENTRUST, the regulatory body for the scheme.

For the period 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011 (the latest 12 month period that figures are available) there were 34 NI Environmental Bodies enrolled by ENTRUST. During this period, £840,919.95 was spent on 47 projects based in Northern Ireland by 9 Environmental Bodies.

The projects by council area and the Environmental Bodies are set out in the following table. A number of the projects by their nature cover more than one council area.

LANDFILL COMMUNITIES FUND – PROJECT/PROJECT SPEND 2010/2011 BY COUNCIL AREA

District Council Area	Environmental Body	Project	Project Spend
Ards Borough Council	Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust	1 Coastal Habitat Restoration –WWT Castle Espie	1 £9,650.00
Armagh City & District Council	EB Scotland Ltd	1 Markethill Recreation Area 2 Palace Grounds Armagh	1 £2,551.10 2 £932.20
Banbridge District Council	Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	1 Solitude Park Maintenance	1 £6,783.51

District Council Area	Environmental Body	Project	Project Spend
Belfast City Council	Groundwork Northern Ireland Colin Glen Trust	1 Glenbank Woodland Trail	1 £980.00
		2 Divis Mountain to Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park and Nature Trail	2 £24,356.49
		3 PIPS House Access Project	3 £1,067.10
		4 Multipurpose Biodiversity Garden and Playspace at An Droichead	4 £4,248.00
		5 Suffolk Community Centre Interactive Outdoor Play Area	5 £46,700.36
		6 Inverary garden – reimagining second bonfire site	6 £705.82
		7 Hannahstown Community Garden	7 £1,682.43
		8 Sport and Leisure Swifts FC	8 £24,905.25
		9 Ligoniel Environment & Heritage Project	9 £17,608.88
		10 Tyndale Community Garden of Reflection	10 £20,421.89
		11 Ligoniel Environment & Heritage Project – Phase II	11 £18,350.34
		12 The HUBB Civil Defence Hall Renovation	12 £29,692.00
		13 The Colin Glen Forest Park Biodiversity Enhancement Programme	13 £20,811.70
Coleraine Borough Council	EB Scotland Limited Conservation Volunteers NI	1 Shamrock Park, Garvagh	1 £144,124.94
		2 Whiterocks Sand Dune Biodiversity Project	2 £23,125.00
Cookstown District Council	EB Scotland Limited	1 Coagh Community Garden	1 £1,500.00

District Council Area	Environmental Body	Project	Project Spend
Craigavon Borough Council	Groundwork Northern Ireland Royal Society for the Protection of Birds Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	1 Aghalee – Beyond the Centre – refurbishment element 2 Enhanced biodiversity at Portmore Lough 3 Enhancement & restoration of floodplain grazing marsh at Portmore Lough 4 Enhancing conditions for NI Priority Species at Portmore Lough 5 Landing Stage at Money Penny's Lockhouse	1 £14,398.91 2 £31,088.65 3 £26,000.00 4 £30,399.36 5 £10,000.00
Derry City Council	Groundwork Northern Ireland	1 Galliagh Neighbourhood Park 2 Junior Wardens Environmental Project 3 Hope Transition Project 4 Glen Park Masterplan – Phase 2 Childrens Play Area 5 Multi Use Games Area @ Lincoln Courts Community Centre 6 Cornshell Creative Space Project	1 £42,804.50 2 £4500.00 3 £18,527.00 4 £41,841.50 5 £6,812.96 6 £580.75
Down District Council	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	1 Northern Ireland Kites 2 Conservation and promotion of grasslands across nature reserves in NI (Ballynahinch)	1 £21,366.44 2 £17,079.74
Fermanagh District Council	Wildlife Trust (Ulster) Conservation Volunteers NI	1 Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark – Fencing 2 Enhancement of Racecourse Lough, Enniskillen 3 Growing Together (Fermanagh)	1 £12,154.35 2 £6,600.00 3 £12,000.00

District Council Area	Environmental Body	Project	Project Spend
Lisburn City Council	Groundwork Northern Ireland	1 Enhancement of Old Colin Woodland 2 Downshire YM Pitch Upgrade	1 £4,871.58 2 £11,467.71
Newry and Mourne District Council	Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	1 Provision of pathways, summer seats, interpretative panels and railings	1 £4,900.00
Newtownabbey Borough Council	Groundwork Northern Ireland Ophir Rugby Football Club Woodland Trust	1 Throne Community Woodland Improvements 2 Ophir Development Project 3 Bringing colour to Carnmoney Hill	1 £13,800.00 2 £50,000.00 3 £4,966.50
North Down Borough Council	Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	1 The conservation and promotion of Wetlands across nature reserves in NI 2 The conservation and promotion of Woodlands across nature reserves in NI	1 £13,404.72 2 £10,900.91
Strabane District Council	Groundwork Northern Ireland	1 Urney Community Walk and season planting 2 Cairdre Community Garden and Allotment Project 3 Environmental Enhancement Project at Ballycolman Linkside Community	1 £18,960.00 2 £9,998.98 3 £1,298.38
Total Expenditure			£840,919.95

Northern Area Plan: Timescale

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the timescale and the stages to be completed prior to the implementation of the Northern Area Plan.

(AQW 8641/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Draft Northern Area Plan 2016 is the subject of an Independent Examination currently being conducted by the Planning Appeals Commission. Stage one of the Independent Examination addressed strategic policy matters as contained in Volume One of the Draft Plan and was held over the period 19th September 2011 until the 6th October 2011. Stage Two of the examination into site specific matters commenced on 23rd January 2012 and is programmed to close on 22nd March 2012. Following the Examination the Planning Appeals Commission will prepare a report recommending how, in its view, the objections should be addressed. The Commission is likely to give a broad indication

of the timescale for preparation of its report at the close of the Independent Examination. Thereafter, the Department will take into account this report, amending the Plan where appropriate, before moving to final adoption. The timescale for this latter stage will depend on the extent and complexity of the issues arising from the Planning Appeals Commission's report.

Northern Area Plan: Development Framework

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment, given that the Northern Area Plan provides a planning framework up to 2016 (i) what the status of the plan will be post 2016; and (ii) what steps he is taking to ensure that any such area plan is introduced in a timely manner.

(AQW 8643/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Draft Northern Area Plan has been formulated to provide a development framework up until 2016. However, under the provisions of PPS1: General Principles (paragraph 45), the Plan can continue to be a material consideration past its stated end date, to the extent that policies and proposals remain applicable to current circumstances. It is anticipated that the Plan will provide a foundation on which future development plans will be formulated by Councils

following on from the Review of Public Administration. At present the Department is currently giving consideration to the best mechanisms for both working with and empowering Councils to participate in Plan production over the run up to the Review of Public Administration, including supportive legislative change.

Unfortunately as of yet I am not in a position to announce a date for the adoption of the plan as it is still subject of an ongoing Independent Examination. The Department has been working with the Planning Appeals Commission to ensure that the Independent Examination process guards against unnecessary delay and ensures that objections are heard as efficiently as possible. Stage one of the Independent Examination addressed strategic policy matters as contained in Volume One of the Draft Plan and was held over the period 19th September 2011 until the 6th October 2011. Stage Two of the examination into site specific matters commenced on 23rd January 2012 and is programmed to close on 22nd March 2012. Following the Examination the Planning Appeals Commission will prepare a report recommending how, in its view, the objections should be addressed. The Department will take into account this report, amending the Plan where appropriate, before moving to final adoption.

Normally the Planning Appeals Commission will inform the Department at the close of the Independent Examination when it expects to deliver its report. Once the Report is received the Department will announce a time table for the adoption of the plan. The Department will continue to monitor progress and if shortages in development land arise, remedial actions can be taken.

Wind Farms: Planning Applications

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications for wind farms have been submitted in each of the last three years; and how many have been (i) approved; and (ii) refused.

(AQW 8649/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In 2009, 6 applications were received, in 2010, 6 applications were received and in 2011, 15 applications were received.

In 2009, 9 applications were approved and 1 was refused, in 2010, 8 applications were approved and none were refused, and in 2011, 5 applications were approved and none were refused.

Taxis: Fares

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment how taxis will be able to charge, under the new regulations, fares less than that shown on their meters.

(AQW 8650/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The proposals for taxi fare regulations mean that a maximum taxi fare would apply in Northern Ireland. As is currently the case with Belfast Public Hire licensed taxis, any driver can charge

less than the metered fare either by agreeing a fare with a passenger in advance of the journey or by deciding on and providing for a regular discount which applies to all fares.

A receipt printer will be required to record and print the maximum fare payable, and the driver will be able to record how much the customer was actually charged.

It is important to understand this proposal – it is about maximum fares not minimum fares and there should be no suggestion otherwise. Licensing and regulation of taxis will help better standards and safety, is what customers, tourists and visitors expect, is good practice in places across the world and is what disability organisations and consumer groups support. This is a challenging issue to get right but I am determined to do so and to move decisively.

Taxis: Belfast By-laws

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the status of Belfast by-laws in relation to the new taxi regulations.

(AQW 8651/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The new Taxi Licence Regulations are scheduled for introduction later this year. These regulations create a new single tier licensing system for all taxis across Northern Ireland. Once the regulations are in place the Belfast Bye-laws, which currently relate only to Belfast Public Hire taxis, will be repealed.

Taxis: Intent of Single-tier System

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment to clarify the intent behind the new two-tier taxi system of private hire and wheelchair access taxis.

(AQW 8652/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The proposed single tier licensing regime whereby all taxis can be hailed or pre-booked but only wheelchair accessible ones can stand at taxi ranks is intended to:

- improve passenger safety by making it easier to identify a licensed taxi,
- increase the availability of taxis at peak times by reducing the restrictions on the types of service taxis can provide,
- give passengers greater freedom to choose the type of taxi they want to take without having to plan and book this in advance,
- increase the provision of wheelchair accessible taxis outside Belfast by making accessibility a requirement for standing at ranks, and
- be the first step in the long term objective to deliver a more accessible taxi fleet

MOT: Exemptions

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment (i) whether he would consider making veteran or vintage cars exempt from MOT, similar to the system that operates in the Irish Republic; and (ii) what action he intends to take to encourage such car owners to use their vehicles on public roads.

(AQW 8667/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department issued a consultation document on 29th November 2011 to seek views on the exemption of historic vehicles from periodic roadworthiness testing, which would include both the MOT and the goods vehicle test. The consultation set out three options for exemption from test - for vehicles first used before 1960, before 1945 or before 1920. The aim of the document was to gather as much information and opinion as possible to enable the Department to select one of these options, whilst avoiding any compromise of road safety. The consultation closed on 21st February 2012 and the Department is presently collating the responses.

When a clear policy on test exemptions for historic vehicles has been finalised, taking into account the responses to the consultation, the Department will bring forward proposals.

The Department is aware of the value of the Northern Ireland historic car fleet and is supportive of the community of enthusiasts who keep these vehicles on the road. This support must of course always be balanced with the need to maintain road safety standards.

Councils: Tendering Practices for Legal Services

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department is taking to ensure that district councils comply with good tendering practices for legal services.

(AQW 8685/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Under the Local Government (Best Value) Act (Northern Ireland) 2002, (the 2002 Act), district councils are required to make arrangements for continuous improvement in the way in which their functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

How individual councils obtain their legal services is legally and technically a matter for each council. However, it is expected that, in line with best value, councils should seek out the most economical provider of a quality service. Also, in his report of 12 June 2008, the Chief Local Government Auditor encouraged all councils to review their legal advice arrangements on a more regular basis. This was reiterated in the current Chief Local Government Auditor's report in 2011 and is something that will be considered in future local government audits.

I have been encouraging local authorities to demonstrate how current procurement arrangements can provide value for money and comply with legislation. I will be meeting with the Local Government Procurement Group shortly to discuss how the sector can improve procurement practices and to encourage collaborative procurement.

I agree strongly that best practice should prevail when tendering legal services and indeed I wrote to councils last year to request details of practices. I shall make it clear at the LGPG meeting my views on these matters.

Planning Application A/2010/0493/F

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of the Environment when he will make a decision on planning application A/2010/0493/F, in relation to an ASDA store at Crescent Link Retail Park, Derry.

(AQW 8692/11-15)

Mr Attwood: This planning application is being assessed along with several other current applications in Derry which include a major retail element as part of the proposals.

My officials have undertaken a thorough reassessment of the relevant retail information associated with these proposals to ensure that decisions are made with the benefit of the most up to date information available.

Each case will be considered on its individual merits. I will take into account all factors, including in town/out of town retail issues.

Discharge Consents

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of the Environment (i) what are the conditions of a permit to discharge; and (ii) what were the conditions of a permit to discharge (a) 10 years ago; and (b) five years ago.

(AQW 8708/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) administers a system of discharge consents which lay down site specific conditions relating to the quality and quantity of effluent that may be discharged. The site specific conditions are formulated using scientific protocols which ensure that

the discharge can be sustained by the receiving waterway without damage to the aquatic environment and without breaching national or EU Directive standards.

When consent conditions are being drawn up, account is taken of:

- the composition and volume of the proposed discharge;
- the water quality target for the receiving water, as specified by the Water Framework Directive;
- the existing quality of the receiving water;
- the available dilution (flow) in the receiving waterway; and
- relevant EU Directive requirements or international agreements.

Most discharge consents include numerical conditions for certain parameters of the effluent, which enables a quantitative assessment of compliance to be made. Formulation of numeric consent conditions may require mathematical modeling. A number of non-numeric conditions may also be stipulated, such as safe access to a sampling point, and the requirement for any treatment system to undergo regular maintenance.

The effluent quality conditions stipulated on a consent will reflect the requirements of the current water quality objectives of the receiving waterway as defined by water quality legislation. Therefore, consents issued 5 and 10 years ago will contain conditions reflective of the legislation at that time. A discharge consent may, however, be reviewed by the Department at intervals of not less than 4 years from the date of issue. The Department will, where appropriate, carry out such a review should it be deemed necessary to meet current legislative requirements.

160-220 Castlereagh Road, Belfast: Planning Permission

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the site at 160-220 Castlereagh Road, Belfast following the refusal of planning permission for a development on this site.
(AQW 8742/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Planning permission for a superstore, car parking, servicing arrangements and landscaping was refused on 7th September 2011 following a public inquiry. The reasons for refusal related to the adequacy of the roads infrastructure and the vehicular access to Castlereagh Road.

The site does, however, have an extant planning permission for a smaller retail development granted on 7 July 2010. This development is for a superstore, car parking, access, servicing arrangements, dotcom area and landscaping.

Planning permission had previously been granted for a residential development comprising 2 detached dwellings, 16 semi-detached dwellings, 40 townhouses and 125 apartments. This permission was granted on 23 January 2006 and has now expired.

The Department is currently processing an outline application for a similar form of residential development (Ref Z/2011/0119/O) which was received on 3 February 2011. The Department is awaiting a number of consultation replies and a petition of objection has been received.

Planning Policy Statements: Section 75 Screening

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment whether a section 75 assessment is carried out on planning policies before they are implemented.
(AQW 8750/11-15)

Mr Attwood: When developing new or revised planning policy statements (PPSs), DOE officials carry out equality screening to assess the impact on the promotion of equality of opportunity and/or good relations in accordance with Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Where an equality screening indicates that adverse impacts are likely to arise, then a full Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) will be undertaken. The EQIA process seeks to ensure that policies do not

have the effect of discriminating against individuals or groups of people who fall within the categories defined in Section 75.

The Department also undertakes equality screening on development plans which apply regional policies at the appropriate local level. Draft EQIAs have been published with a number consultation draft plans, including: Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (published in November 2004); draft Banbridge, Newry & Mourne Area Plan 2015 (published in August 2006); and draft Northern Area Plan 2016 (published in May 2005). Final EQIAs have been prepared for the Belfast Houses in Multiple Occupation Subject Plan 2015 (adopted December 2008); Ards & Down Area Plan 2015 (adopted in March 2009); and Magherafelt Area Plan 2015 (adopted in December 2011).

Finally, I can advise that the Equality Scheme for the Department of the Environment (2011-2016), which has been approved by the Equality Commission NI on 25 January 2012, is available to view or download at www.doeni.gov.uk/index/information/equality_unit.

Restaurants and Bars: Disability Access

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment whether councils have to take disability access into account before granting licences to restaurants and bars.

(AQW 8753/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Only restaurants or bars that provide entertainment on their premises are required to be licensed by councils. The terms, conditions and restrictions attached to an entertainments licence will be decided by the council, and different terms may be applied to different venues. The legislation for entertainments licensing refers to facilities for the disabled as one of the factors that may be specified in the terms of the licence.

In addition, disability access is covered in Part 10 of the Department's Model Terms, Conditions and Restrictions for Indoor Entertainments – Technical Requirements. Councils are required to have regard to any model terms, conditions and restrictions issued by the Department.

Treasure

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment how many items of treasure have been found in each of the last three years, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 8757/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency: Built Heritage records show that in the last three years there has only been one reported find of possible treasure made in Northern Ireland. The artefact was reported to the NIEA in June 2011 as being found in December 2009. It was found within the Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency and a date has been set for a Coroner's inquest in late March 2012. The Coroner will rule whether that artefact qualifies as treasure or not.

In addition to this find, there are a number of artefacts that were found prior to the last three years but have had Coroner's inquests and been declared treasure within the last three years. In 2009, a Bronze Age gold bracelet from the Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency, a Bronze Age gold personal ornament from the South Down constituency and a medieval silver ring from Upper Bann were declared treasure by the Coroner. In 2012 to date, a silver coin hoard from Newry & Armagh and gold finger ring from Fermanagh and South Tyrone have been declared treasure by the Coroner.

Archaeological Objects: Licence Requirements

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment how many people have been convicted of searching for archaeological objects without a licence in each of the last three years, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 8759/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In Northern Ireland searching for archaeological objects is controlled under the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995. Under that Order, it is illegal to excavate for

archaeological objects, which will include treasure items, without a licence from the Department of the Environment. Furthermore, any person who, except under and in accordance with any conditions attached to a licence issued by the Department, excavates in or under any land (whether or not such excavation involves the removal of the surface of the land) for the purpose of searching generally for archaeological objects or of searching for, exposing or examining any particular structure or thing of archaeological interest shall be guilty of an offence and liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 3 (£1,000) on the standard scale.

I am advised that, according to records held by the Built Heritage Directorate of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, covering the last three years, no person in Northern Ireland has been convicted of searching for archaeological objects without a licence.

Detection Devices: Protected Sites

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment how many people have been convicted of being in possession of a detection device on a protected site in each of the last three years, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 8760/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency: Built Heritage records show that in the last three years no person in Northern Ireland has been convicted of being in possession of a detection device on a protected site.

Areas of Townscape Character

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to list the Areas of Townscape Character.

(AQW 8761/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Planning Policy Statement (PPS 6): Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage (March 1999) sets out the Department's planning policies for the protection and conservation of archaeological remains and features of the built heritage and advises on the treatment of these issues in development plans.

An addendum to PPS 6 'Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage' entitled 'Areas of Townscape Character' was published in August 2005. The addendum, which should be read in conjunction with the provisions of PPS 6, provides additional planning policies relating to Areas of Townscape Character, for demolition of buildings, new development and the control of advertisements. The addendum advises that, for its purposes and those of other planning policy publications, all references to Areas of Townscape Character should be read as including Areas of Village Character.

The complete list of Areas of Townscape / Village Character is set out below and includes (a) those designated in accordance with regional planning policy through the development plan process (see Summary Tables 1 & 2 below) and (b) those listed in Schedule 1 of the Planning (Demolition and Description of Buildings) Direction 2009 (See Table 3 below).

SUMMARY TABLE 1: ATC & AVC DESIGNATIONS IN ADOPTED PLANS

Adopted Area Development Plan	Number of ATCs	Number of AVCs	ATC & AVC Total
Ards & Down Area Plan 2015	11	0	11
Cookstown Area Plan 2010	12	0	12
Craigavon Area Plan 2010	4	0	4
Derry Area Plan 2011	4	0	4
Dungannon & South Tyrone Area Plan 2010	11	0	11

Adopted Area Development Plan	Number of ATCs	Number of AVCs	ATC & AVC Total
Fermanagh Area Plan 2007	3	17	20
Magherafelt Area Plan 2015	3	0	3
Totals	48	17	65

SUMMARY TABLE 2: PROPOSED ATC & AVC DESIGNATIONS IN DRAFT PLANS

Draft Area Development Plan	Number of ATCs	Number of AVCs	ATC & AVC Total
Banbridge /Newry Area Plan 2015	35	0	35
Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	86	14	100
Northern Area Plan 2016	8	1	9
Totals	129	15	144

Note: For breakdown of each plan refer to separate 'List of Areas of Townscape Character (ATC) and Areas of Village Character (AVC) in Northern Ireland' dated 28/02/12.

TABLE 3: AREAS OF TOWNSCAPE CHARACTER LISTED IN SCHEDULE 1 OF THE PLANNING (DEMOLITION AND DESCRIPTION OF BUILDINGS) DIRECTION 2009

Council	Area of Townscape (ATC)
Belfast City Council	Cherryvalley ATC
	Circular Road ATC
	Cliftonville ATC
	Donegall Park Avenue ATC
	Hampton Park ATC
	Holyland ATC
	North/South Parade and Park Road ATC
	Rosetta ATC
	Rugby Road ATC
	Sunningdale ATC
	Twaddell ATC
Wandsworth ATC	
Ballymena District Council Area	Galgorm Road and Old Galgorm Road ATC
Castlereagh Borough Council Area	Creagh ATC
	Thiepval ATC
Newtownabbey Borough Council Area	Hazelbank/Abbeylands ATC
	Lenamore (Extension) ATC
North Down Borough Council	Bangor Bay (Princetown Road and Seacliff Road/Clifton Road) ATC

In addition to those ATC's listed above in Table 3, the following tables list Areas of Townscape Character referred to in Adopted and Draft Plans.

ARDS AND DOWN AREA PLAN 2015 (ADOPTED 30TH MARCH 2009)

Plan Designation	Settlement	Location	Council Area
ATC	Kearney	Ards Countryside	Ards Borough
ATC	Comber	The Square	Ards Borough
ATC	Comber	The Mill Village	Ards Borough
ATC	Donaghadee	New Road/Warren Road	Ards Borough
ATC	Greyabbey	-	Ards Borough
ATC	Kircubbin	-	Ards Borough
ATC	Newtownards	Court Street/Court Square	Ards Borough
ATC	Bryansford	-	Down District
ATC	Dundrum	-	Down District
ATC	Newcastle	The Harbour, The Rock and King Street	Down District
ATC	Seaforde	-	Down District

DRAFT BANBRIDGE / NEWRY AND MOURNE AREA PLAN 2015 (PUBLISHED 22ND AUGUST 2006)

Plan Designation	Settlement	Location	Council Area
ATC	Annaclone	-	Banbridge District
ATC	Banbridge	Hayes Park	Banbridge District
ATC	Banbridge	Peggy's Loaning	Banbridge District
ATC	Banbridge	Town Centre	Banbridge District
ATC	Dromore	Meeting Street	Banbridge District
ATC	Dromore	Mount Street	Banbridge District
ATC	Gilford	Gilford Mill & High Street	Banbridge District
ATC	Gilford	Town Centre	Banbridge District
ATC	Leitrim	-	Banbridge District
ATC	Loughbrickland	-	Banbridge District
ATC	Rathfriland	-	Banbridge District
ATC	Scarva	-	Banbridge District
ATC	Tullylish	-	Banbridge District
ATC	Annalong	-	Newry & Mourne District

Plan Designation	Settlement	Location	Council Area
ATC	Bessbrook	Chapel Road	Newry & Mourne District
ATC	Bessbrook	Mount Charles	Newry & Mourne District
ATC	Crossmaglen	-	Newry & Mourne District
ATC	Forkhill	-	Newry & Mourne District
ATC	Hilltown	-	Newry & Mourne District
ATC	Jerrettspass	-	Newry & Mourne District
ATC	Kilkeel	-	Newry & Mourne District
ATC	Newry	Bridge Street	Newry & Mourne District
ATC	Newry	Canal Street	Newry & Mourne District
ATC	Newry	Cornmarket	Newry & Mourne District
ATC	Newry	Corry Square	Newry & Mourne District
ATC	Newry	Dominic Street	Newry & Mourne District
ATC	Newry	Drumalane Road	Newry & Mourne District
ATC	Newry	Dublin Road	Newry & Mourne District
ATC	Newry	High Street	Newry & Mourne District
ATC	Newry	Kilmorey Street	Newry & Mourne District
ATC	Newry	Windsor Hill	Newry & Mourne District
ATC	Rostrevor	Victoria Square	Newry & Mourne District
ATC	Rostrevor	Warrenpoint Road	Newry & Mourne District
ATC	Warrenpoint	Town Centre & Seafront	Newry & Mourne District
ATC	Warrenpoint	Well Road	Newry & Mourne District

DRAFT BELFAST METROPOLITAN AREA PLAN 2015 (PUBLISHED 30TH NOVEMBER 2004)

Plan Designation	Settlement	Location	Council Area
ATC	Belfast	Alexander Park	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Ardenlee	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Belmont	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Botanic Avenue	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Castlehill Road	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Cherryvalley	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Cherryvalley Extension	Belfast City

Plan Designation	Settlement	Location	Council Area
ATC	Belfast	Circular Road	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Cliftonville	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Cyprus Park/ Cyprus Gardens	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Donegall Road (Village)	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Donegall Road East	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Falls/Donegall Road	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Falls/St Mary's	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Finaghy	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Fruithill Park	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Glandore Gardens	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Green Road	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Hampton Park	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Holland Park	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Holyland	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Hollywood Arches	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Innishfayle	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Knock Eden Park	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Lagan Village	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Ligoniel	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Lisburn Road	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Lower Cavehill Road	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Lower Cliftonville	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Lower Lisburn Road	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Lower Ormeau	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	North Parade/ South Parade	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Ormeau	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Ravenhill Park	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Ravenhill Triangle	Belfast City

Plan Designation	Settlement	Location	Council Area
ATC	Belfast	Ravenscroft Avenue	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Rosetta	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Rugby Road	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Sandford Avenue/Sunbury Avenue	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Shankill	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Stockmans Lane/Mooreland Park	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Stranmillis Riverside	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Stranmillis Village	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Sunningdale	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Templemore Avenue	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Twaddell	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Upper Malone	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Victoria Street/Oxford Street	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Wellesley Avenue/Keir	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Willowholme	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Woodstock Road	Belfast City
ATC	Belfast	Woodvale	Belfast City
ATC	Carrickfergus	Belfast Road	Carrickfergus Borough
ATC	Carrickfergus	Larne Road	Carrickfergus Borough
ATC	Greenisland	-	Carrickfergus Borough
ATC	Greenisland	Shore Road	Carrickfergus Borough
ATC	Metropolitan Castlereagh	Cregagh	Castlereagh Borough
ATC	Metropolitan Castlereagh	Cregagh Park & Everton Drive	Castlereagh Borough
ATC	Metropolitan Castlereagh	Dundonald	Castlereagh Borough
ATC	Metropolitan Castlereagh	Newtownbreda	Castlereagh Borough

Plan Designation	Settlement	Location	Council Area
ATC	Metropolitan Castlereagh	Rochester Avenue	Castlereagh Borough
ATC	Metropolitan Castlereagh	Thiepval	Castlereagh Borough
AVC	Moneyreagh	-	Castlereagh Borough
AVC	Drumbeg	-	Lisburn City
AVC	Edenderry	-	Lisburn City
AVC	Glenavy	-	Lisburn City
AVC	Lambeg	-	Lisburn City
ATC	Lisburn City	Bachelors Walk	Lisburn City
ATC	Lisburn City	Hilden	Lisburn City
ATC	Lisburn City	Seymour Street	Lisburn City
ATC	Lisburn City	Wallace Park	Lisburn City
ATC	Lisburn City	Warren Park	Lisburn City
AVC	Lower Ballinderry	-	Lisburn City
ATC	Metropolitan Lisburn	Dunmurry	Lisburn City
AVC	Purdysburn	-	Lisburn City
AVC	Upper Ballinderry	-	Lisburn City
ATC	Ballyclare	-	Newtownabbey Borough
AVC	Ballyeaston	-	Newtownabbey Borough
AVC	Doagh	-	Newtownabbey Borough
ATC	Metropolitan Newtownabbey	Abbeyville Park	Newtownabbey Borough
ATC	Metropolitan Newtownabbey	Fernagh	Newtownabbey Borough
ATC	Metropolitan Newtownabbey	Hazelbank/ Abbeylands	Newtownabbey Borough
ATC	Metropolitan Newtownabbey	Lenamore	Newtownabbey Borough
ATC	Metropolitan Newtownabbey	Old Manse Road	Newtownabbey Borough
ATC	Metropolitan Newtownabbey	Rush Park	Newtownabbey Borough
ATC	Metropolitan Newtownabbey	Whiteabbey	Newtownabbey Borough

Plan Designation	Settlement	Location	Council Area
ATC	Metropolitan Newtownabbey	Whiteabbey Mill	Newtownabbey Borough
ATC	Metropolitan Newtownabbey	Ypres Park	Newtownabbey Borough
AVC	Straid	-	Newtownabbey Borough
ATC	Bangor	Bangor Central	North Down Borough
ATC	Bangor	Bangor East	North Down Borough
ATC	Bangor	Bangor West	North Down Borough
AVC	Crawfordsburn	-	North Down Borough
AVC	Groomsport	-	North Down Borough
AVC	Helen's Bay	-	North Down Borough
ATC	Hollywood	Hollywood North	North Down Borough
ATC	Hollywood	Hollywood South	North Down Borough
ATC	Hollywood	Hollywood/ Bangor Road	North Down Borough
ATC	Hollywood	Kinnegar	North Down Borough
ATC	Hollywood		North Down Borough

COOKSTOWN AREA PLAN 2010 (ADOPTED 25TH JUNE 2004)

Plan Designation	Settlement	Location	Council Area
ATC	Ballinderry	-	Cookstown District
ATC	Ballyronan	-	Cookstown District
ATC	Churchtown	-	Cookstown District
ATC	Coagh	-	Cookstown District
ATC	Cookstown	-	Cookstown District
ATC	Desertcreat	-	Cookstown District
ATC	Drapersfield	-	Cookstown District
ATC	Pomeroy	-	Cookstown District
ATC	Stewartstown	-	Cookstown District
ATC	The Loop	-	Cookstown District
ATC	The Rock	-	Cookstown District
ATC	Tullyhogue	-	Cookstown District

CRAIGAVON AREA PLAN 2010 (ADOPTED 25TH AUGUST 2004)

Plan Designation	Settlement	Location	Council Area
ATC	Charlestown	-	Craigavon Borough
ATC	Donaghcloney	-	Craigavon Borough
ATC	Lurgan	College Walk	Craigavon Borough
ATC	Portadown	Bachelor's Walk	Craigavon Borough

DERRY AREA PLAN 2011 (ADOPTED 1ST MAY 2000)

Plan Designation	Settlement	Location	Council Area
ATC	Culmore	-	Derry City
ATC	Eglinton	-	Derry City
ATC	Londonderry	Bond's Hill	Derry City
ATC	Londonderry	Victoria Park	Derry City

DUNGANNON & SOUTH TYRONE AREA PLAN 2010 (ADOPTED 16TH MARCH 2005)

Plan Designation	Settlement	Location	Council Area
ATC	Augher	-	Dungannon & S.Tyrone District
ATC	Aughnacloy	-	Dungannon & S.Tyrone District
ATC	Ballygawley	-	Dungannon & S.Tyrone District
ATC	Benburb	-	Dungannon & S.Tyrone District
ATC	Castlecaulfield	-	Dungannon & S.Tyrone District
ATC	Clogher	-	Dungannon & S.Tyrone District
ATC	Coalisland	-	Dungannon & S.Tyrone District
ATC	Donaghmore	-	Dungannon & S.Tyrone District
ATC	Dungannon	-	Dungannon & S.Tyrone District
ATC	Fivemiletown	-	Dungannon & S.Tyrone District
ATC	Moy	-	Dungannon & S.Tyrone District

FERMANAGH AREA PLAN 2007 (ADOPTED 1ST MARCH 1997)

Plan Designation	Settlement	Location	Council Area
AVC	Ballinamallard	-	Fermanagh District
AVC	Belcoo/Holywell	-	Fermanagh District
AVC	Belleek	-	Fermanagh District
AVC	Brookeborough	-	Fermanagh District

Plan Designation	Settlement	Location	Council Area
AVC	Derrygonnelly	-	Fermanagh District
AVC	Ederney	-	Fermanagh District
ATC	Enniskillen	Belmore Street	Fermanagh District
ATC	Enniskillen	Henry Street	Fermanagh District
AVC	Garrison	-	Fermanagh District
ATC	Irvinestown	-	Fermanagh District
AVC	Kesh	-	Fermanagh District
AVC	Lack	-	Fermanagh District
AVC	Lisbellaw	-	Fermanagh District
AVC	Lisnarick	-	Fermanagh District
AVC	Magheraveely	-	Fermanagh District
AVC	Maguiresbridge	-	Fermanagh District
AVC	Newtownbutler	-	Fermanagh District
AVC	Pettigoe/ Tullyhommon	-	Fermanagh District
AVC	Rosslea	-	Fermanagh District
AVC	Tempo	-	Fermanagh District

MAGHERAFELT AREA PLAN 2015 (ADOPTED 14TH DECEMBER 2011)

Plan Designation	Settlement	Location	Council Area
ATC	Maghera	-	Magherafelt District
ATC	Magherafelt	-	Magherafelt District
ATC	Upperlands	-	Magherafelt District

DRAFT NORTHERN AREA PLAN 2016 (PUBLISHED 11TH MAY 2005)

Plan Designation	Settlement	Location	Council Area
ATC	Coleraine	Coleraine Town Centre	Coleraine Borough
ATC	Portrush	-	Coleraine Borough
ATC	Limavady	Main Street	Limavady Borough
AVC	Armoy	-	Moyle District
ATC*	Coleraine	Mountsandel Road	Coleraine Borough
ATC*	Coleraine	Lodge Road	Coleraine Borough

Plan Designation	Settlement	Location	Council Area
ATC*	Portstewart	Central Avenue	Coleraine Borough
ATC*	Portstewart	Harryville	Coleraine Borough
ATC*	Portballintrae	-	Coleraine Borough

* Proposed and accepted at Stage 2 of Public Examination into the draft Northern Area Plan 2016 – Consequently these five ATCs are now recognised as Draft Plan proposals.

Trade Union: Secondment

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the number of (a) full-time; and (b) part-time staff who are currently on secondment from his Department, or its arm's length bodies, to each recognised trade union; (ii) the salary scale for each secondee; and (iii) the length of each secondment to date.

(AQW 8774/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The number of full time staff currently on secondment from this Department or its arm's length bodies broken down by union, salary scale for each secondee and the duration of each secondment is set out in the Table below. There are no part-time staff currently on secondment to a recognised trade union.

Department	Number of Staff	Duration of Secondment as at 1 March 2012	*Minimum to Maximum Salary Scale	Union
DOE	1	3 years 3 months	£34,163 to £38,893	NIPSA
	1	2 years 11 months	£21,392 to £23,250	NIPSA

* Current salary scale based on the 2010-2011 pay award.

Planning: Application Backlog

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the current backlog of planning applications.

(AQO 1424/11-15)

Mr Attwood: You may be aware of the Action Plan in place to deal with the PPS14/21 applications that were at deferral stage prior to the publication of the final version of PPS21 on 1st June 2010. I am pleased to advise that this review has been complete.

Of the other backlog applications, I agreed with officials that we should initially concentrate on determining the 'major' category of planning applications that have been in the system for more than 12 months. As a result over the last 18 months, the number of applications which exceed 12 months in the system reduced by over 40% to 2250 of which some 1450 are major applications.

There are a number of reasons for delays in processing planning applications mainly due to the need to redeploy planning and administrative staff due to an unprecedented reduction in income from planning application fee receipts. This has led to reallocation of cases to remaining staff and increases in case loads. That said, the backlog of applications is continuing to reduce but inevitably the average and percentile timescale for processing will lengthen as decisions are issued on more older applications. I have developed a workforce planning model in order to build a planning system that is more fit for purpose and provide decisions on planning applications in a timely manner, subject to finance being available.

I would urge applicants to engage with my planners and local communities at an early stage, and to submit high quality applications accompanied by all of the information and surveys necessary to allow if to be determined as quickly as possible. As I have demonstrated on Article 31 applications, active management, firm leadership and tighter systems can produce a more fit for purpose planning system.

Planning Policy Statement 21: Review

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the review of PPS 21 and rural planning policy.

(AQO 1419/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The review of the operation of PPS21 is now concluded. I am currently finalising the review report and will announce the outcome of the review in the near future.

Wind Turbines: Financial Benefits

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of the Environment to outline how he will ensure that communities living near wind turbines get greater financial benefits than they have received to date.

(AQO 1426/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The community benefits to be derived by any given community group will depend on the scale of the proposed development. Given our dispersed rural settlement pattern, wind farm developers often enter into negotiations with individual farmers and rural dwellers as well as community groups, local to the proposed windfarm development. The question remains as to what constitutes a 'fair', 'reasonable' or 'meaningful' level of benefit for the local community.

I am encouraged therefore that the Northern Ireland Renewable Industry Group (NIRIG) is at an advanced stage in the development of a community benefit protocol. The Sustainable Energy Interdepartmental Working Group will consider this document when published.

I have met officials to discuss how, if possible, to better manage the community benefits arising from renewable applications. I will look, in particular, at the Scottish model, plan to meet the Fermanagh Trust which has published proposals and see how to move the issue forward.

Rose Energy: Planning Application

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the Rose Energy planning application.

(AQO 1428/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The applications are now in the final stage of consideration. The files on this case containing a report and recommendation will be forwarded to me shortly. The Department will make a recommendation on whether to proceed by way of a NOP to approve or refuse the applications or by way of a Public Inquiry.

Sprucefield Centre Ltd: Planning Application

Mr Givan asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the Sprucefield Centre Limited planning application.

(AQO 1429/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As you may be aware the Department has requested that the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) hold a Public Local Inquiry to consider this application.

The holding of the Inquiry has been delayed by inter alia judicial review proceedings - which have now been withdrawn - and the need to consider and advertise further environmental information submitted by the applicant. Further information was submitted to the Department on 18 August 2011 and again on 3 February 2012. This information is presently under consideration by my officials and is being advertised in accordance with the statutory requirements.

I am advised that the Department will be in a position before the end of March 2012, to write to the PAC requesting a new date for the inquiry.

Driver and Vehicle Agency: Coleraine Jobs

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment, in light of the proposed changes to the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA), what steps can be taken to protect the 300 DVA jobs in Coleraine.

(AQO 1430/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I am deeply concerned about the possible impact on jobs as a consequence of the work currently being undertaken by DVLA to examine how they can deliver an integrated IT system and the associated study on the options for the delivery of vehicle licensing services in NI following integration of the IT systems.

The transfer of some licensing work to the Web or to post offices would not have a major impact. This would be relatively straightforward work, and most staff are engaged on other duties such as enforcement. However, DVLA have recently announced that they intend to close all their regional and local offices in Britain, with the loss of 1400 jobs, and centralise the work in Swansea. DVLA are looking at this option in relation to DVA.

I have had two meetings in London with the Transport Minister on this issue and emphasised the impact that the loss of jobs could have in NI, especially in Coleraine, where 260 of the 320 jobs are located. In view of all the other challenges facing our economy the threat to jobs is unacceptable. In addition, I have argued the need to maintain capacity in anticipation of new foreign haulage charges, the capacity of DVA staff to undertake contract work from Swansea and other options to maintain staff numbers.

I have been assured that no decisions have yet been taken about how vehicle licensing will be carried out here in the future and that I will be fully consulted before any decisions are taken. I am now writing to the Secretary of State for Transport and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to escalate my argument on this issue and to outline further proposals to protect staff numbers. I have been highly vigilant on this issue since becoming Minister, I will continue to be so and urge all to join me in this effort.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Social Clauses: Job Creation

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many jobs have been created as a result of social clauses in public procurement contracts, in the Foyle constituency in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8132/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The purpose of the employment related social clauses in contracts is not job creation per se but rather to provide job opportunities for the unemployed and apprentices. (More recently, a requirement for student placements has also been added.) The measures are not targeted at geographical areas and the contracts do not stipulate from where contractors or their subcontractors should draw their workforce.

I am therefore unable to say what the impact of social clauses has been in the Foyle constituency. However, a number of departments have provided me with the numbers of construction contracts containing requirements for job opportunities that they awarded in Foyle in the past five years. They have also indicated the number of placements provided. This information is set out in aggregate in tabular form below.

No employment related placements have been provided in non-construction contracts.

Year	No. of contracts with employment clauses	Number of placements provided for:	
		Unemployed	Apprentices
2007/08*	0	0	0
2008/09*	1	2	0
2009/10	1	2	16
2010/11	7	14	37
2011/12	4	30	7
Total	13	48	60

* Employment related social clauses were first introduced in December 2008 for contracts with procurements commencing after that date.

Renewable Energy: Stormont Estate

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what plans are in place to utilise the Stormont Estate to generate renewable energy.

(AQW 8372/11-15)

Mr Wilson: A 100 KW wood pellet biomass boiler was installed in the Stables Building on the Stormont Estate in 2009/10.

The feasibility of further opportunities for renewable energy installations within the estate will be considered as part of a more wide-ranging review of accommodation within the Stormont Estate. It is anticipated that this review will take place beyond the current budget period (FY10/11-FY13/14).

Car-charging Units: Stormont Estate

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether his Department has any plans to install electric car charging facilities in the grounds of the Stormont Estate.

(AQW 8376/11-15)

Mr Wilson: In July 2011 DFP engaged with DRD to consider the potential for providing charging units within the Stormont Estate car park as part of DRD's 'plugged-in places' project.

Year 1 of the project involved selecting locations for 'public' charging points however the Stormont Estate was not selected as a preferred location due to the small numbers of public vehicles entering the estate.

Contracts: Central Procurement Directorate

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the (i) value; and (ii) percentage of all contracts awarded from the Central Procurement Directorate won by businesses in each district council area, for the latest available year.

(AQW 8420/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) does not currently hold information on the contracts awarded in each council area. It is usually possible to deduce the council area from address data provided by suppliers. This is normally a very time consuming manual task that would require several weeks to complete. However, CPD is currently developing systems to automate this process and it is anticipated that an analysis of contracts awarded during 2011/2012, by council area, will be available in May 2012.

Properties: Rates Register

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 7257/11-15, (i) how many of the properties have been built in the last six months and are yet to appear on the register of rated properties; and (ii) to detail the number of properties whose ownership has been unidentified for more than six months.

(AQW 8442/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The number of the properties that have been built in the last six months and are yet to appear on the register of rated properties is not available. However, of the 19,895 vacant properties where ownership was not identified within Northern Ireland as at 29th January 2012, 1,203 had a first valuation after 29th July 2011 (6 months prior to 29th January 2012). All of these properties appear on the register of rated properties.

The number of the properties where ownership has been unidentified for more than six months is not available.

All domestic properties which did not have ownership details were subject to a number of tracing steps as part of the preparations for the implementation of Rating of Empty Homes on 1st October 2011, including: issue of letters; land registration and electoral register searches; matching of Power NI records; inspection visits; and use of an external tracing service.

Properties: Unidentified Ownership

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 7257/11-15, what action has been taken to reduce the number of properties with unidentified ownership.

(AQW 8444/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Rating of Empty Homes (REH) was introduced on 1st October 2011. The policy creates a liability of 100% of occupied rates for vacant domestic properties in the Valuation List.

A number of exclusions apply and generally these have to be applied for. However, a 12 month developer exclusion from REH from the date of completion of new properties is included in the legislation; this has been extended to 18 months for new properties completed before 31st March 2012. This exclusion and the exclusion for properties with a rateable Capital Value of £20,000 or less are awarded automatically.

Work has been ongoing since early 2011 by a team of staff to gather ownership details of empty domestic properties and by October 34,500 owners had been identified.

Work continues to trace both the 19,000 domestic and non-domestic vacant owners recorded on our rating system. The primary source of information has been the Land Registry and Registry of Deeds and more recently other investigative methods have been added to include PowerNI, NI Water and through the recently awarded tracing contract service, although inevitably, as the property is vacant, these sources are less useful than for occupied properties. LPS staff have also been obtaining ownership information when dealing with ratepayers by telephone and will continue to do so. However, it is inevitable that not all owners of empty properties will be traceable.

Rating: Vacant Industrial/Non-domestic Properties

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the rationale for the vacant rating of industrial properties and vacant non-domestic properties being assessed at 50 percent, whilst vacant rating for industrial properties are also assessed at 50 percent, even though occupied industrial properties are levied at 30 percent.

(AQW 8468/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Empty properties that are constructed or adapted for industrial purposes are not subject to rates. This is not the position in England and Wales where rates are charged on empty factories.

This was an issue considered in a policy evaluation undertaken and published by my Department in 2009. In the light of that evaluation I decided not to remove this exclusion due to concerns about eroding the Northern Ireland industrial base. Longer term, however, the case for continuing this exemption needs to be looked at again when the economy recovers.

The Executive has agreed that for the current spending review period, 70% industrial derating will continue apply to eligible properties occupied for manufacturing purposes and liability will therefore remain at 30% liability.

Employment: District Council Areas

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the percentage and number of people of working age who are employed in each district council area.

(AQW 8540/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Estimates of the numbers in employment by district council area are sourced from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), Local Area Database, with the most recent data available for January – December 2010.

Please note that LFS estimates at District Council Area level are based on relatively small sample sizes and are subject to a higher degree of sampling variability. They should, therefore, be treated with caution. In addition, these estimates are based on the residency of an individual.

The requested breakdown of employment by District Council Area is shown in Table 1 overleaf.

TABLE 1: ALL THOSE AGED 16 - 64 AND IN EMPLOYMENT, BY DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA

District Council	Total in employment	Employment Rate
Antrim	25,000	72.7
Ards	32,000	67.4
Armagh	27,000	65.7
Ballymena	23,000	60.7
Ballymoney	14,000	68.4
Banbridge	24,000	73.4
Belfast	111,000	65.0
Carrickfergus	20,000	76.6
Castlereagh	31,000	73.0
Coleraine	23,000	61.8
Cookstown	17,000	67.6
Craigavon	43,000	70.6
Derry	41,000	55.4
Down	31,000	70.6
Dungannon	23,000	59.1
Fermanagh	27,000	66.1
Larne	14,000	65.7
Limavady	13,000	61.2

District Council	Total in employment	Employment Rate
Lisburn	50,000	69.0
Magherafelt	20,000	66.3
Moyle	8,000	72.0
Newry & Mourne	38,000	64.3
Newtownabbey	33,000	68.2
North Down	36,000	66.8
Omagh	20,000	58.7
Strabane	12,000	51.2
Northern Ireland	*755,000	65.8

*Total does not add up due to rounding of figures

Employment: Public Sector

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the percentage and number of people of working age in each district council area who are employed in the public sector.

(AQW 8541/11-15)

Mr Wilson: It is not possible to provide information on the percentage and number of people of working age in each district council area who are employed in the public sector. However, estimates for the number of employee jobs in the public sector in each district council area are available from the Business Register and Employment Survey 2010.

These estimates are based on the location of the job and do not distinguish between employees of working age and non-working age. Estimates for the total number of non-agricultural employee jobs in each district council area are also available from this source. Percentages have been calculated using these figures.

The information is attached in table 1 overleaf.

TABLE 1: PERCENTAGE AND NUMBER OF PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYEE JOBS IN NORTHERN IRELAND BY DISTRICT COUNCIL, SEPTEMBER 2010

District Council	Number of Public Sector Employee Jobs	Percentage of Total Employee Jobs	Total ¹ Employee Jobs
Antrim	9,561	34%	28,309
Ards	4,769	29%	16,633
Armagh	6,228	36%	17,208
Ballymena	7,079	31%	23,149
Ballymoney	2,140	30%	7,124
Banbridge	2,960	26%	11,351
Belfast	71,604	36%	201,081
Carrickfergus	2,448	34%	7,118
Castlereagh	11,523	43%	26,523

District Council	Number of Public Sector Employee Jobs	Percentage of Total Employee Jobs	Total¹ Employee Jobs
Coleraine	6,283	29%	21,657
Cookstown	1,985	17%	11,985
Craigavon	11,229	32%	35,168
Derry	14,892	33%	44,955
Down	6,230	34%	18,590
Dungannon	4,503	22%	20,225
Fermanagh	5,481	26%	21,172
Larne	1,886	21%	9,101
Limavady	2,552	34%	7,594
Lisburn	9,437	23%	40,555
Magherafelt	3,791	28%	13,667
Moyle	1,060	34%	3,125
Newry & Mourne	8,503	27%	31,933
Newtownabbey	6,363	22%	28,565
North Down	5,917	29%	20,676
Omagh	6,968	41%	17,064
Strabane	2,292	26%	8,738
Total	*217,684	31%	*693,268

Source: Business Register and Employment Survey, 2010

1 These figures exclude agriculture but include animal husbandry service activities and hunting, trapping and game propagation.

* Totals may not add up due to rounding of figures.

‘Rebalancing the Northern Ireland Economy’

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what potential costs to the Block Grant have been discussed since the publication of the estimates in the UK Government’s consultation document ‘Rebalancing the Northern Ireland Economy’.

(AQW 8647/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Ministerial Working Group set up to take forward the work on ‘Rebalancing the Northern Ireland economy’ agreed a Terms of Reference and work programme at our first meeting on 15 December 2011. This programme includes a specific workstream to examine in detail the costs associated with devolving Corporation Tax.

Officials have since been progressing this work with HM Treasury and HMRC counterparts. All elements of the costs presented in the UK Governments consultation document and their later branch plant estimates are being closely examined. No new cost estimates will be available until the final report of the Ministerial Working Group.

Contracts: Thresholds

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is the threshold for Government contracts above which the Central Procurement Division must be involved.

(AQW 8673/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Executive's Public Procurement Policy requires Departments, their Agencies, NDPBs and public corporations to carry out their procurement activities by means of documented Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) or a relevant Centre of Procurement Expertise (CoPE).

There are no thresholds relating to the provision of procurement services by CPD under a Service Level Agreement (SLA).

Businesses: South Down

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many registered businesses are in the South Down area.

(AQW 8733/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The number of VAT and/or PAYE registered businesses can be obtained from the Interdepartmental Business Register. At January 2012, there were 5,050 VAT and/or PAYE registered businesses in the South Down Parliamentary Constituency.

Rating: Non-domestic System

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he has any plans to reform the non-domestic rating system so that it is fairer and more accurately reflects the profit that a business makes in a year as opposed to the commercial value of a building.

(AQW 8767/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I have no plans to change the methodology for valuing commercial properties for rating purposes.

The valuations for the majority of commercial properties in Northern Ireland are based on an estimate of their rental value.

For most businesses profitability is a highly volatile figure from one year to the next and would be an extremely difficult and costly way of administering a local tax. Profit shifting and shielding are particular issues with such an approach.

Gross Domestic Product

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the Gross Domestic Product in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8780/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is not produced for Northern Ireland. Because of a definitional change, what was formerly referred to as GDP was actually Gross Value Added (GVA) at basic prices. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is responsible for producing GVA for the UK and its regions.

The table overleaf details the GVA in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years (2006 to 2010). The information provided for Northern Ireland includes GVA per head of the population and Total GVA.

	Northern Ireland GVA Per head (£)	Northern Ireland Total GVA (£ million)
2006	15,359	26,750
2007	16,013	28,169

	Northern Ireland GVA Per head (£)	Northern Ireland Total GVA (£ million)
2008	15,928	28,271
2009	15,249	27,279
2010 ¹	15,651	28,162

1 2010 estimates are provisional.

Block Grant

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, for each of the last four years, to detail (i) the value of the Block Grant; (ii) the amount of money collected through district rates; and (iii) the total amount of Executive expenditure.

(AQW 8795/11-15)

Mr Wilson: In terms of the Member's reference to the Block Grant, I have provided figures for the NI Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) which represents devolved expenditure that is financed by HM Treasury.

This expenditure is enhanced by the Executive's own revenue raising powers in terms of the regional rate and borrowing under the Reinvestment and Reform Initiative.

The level of money collected through the district rate is a matter for individual councils.

The table below sets out the funding received from HM Treasury in terms of the NI DEL and the funding generated by the regional rate and RRI Borrowing. The expenditure is net of any departmental receipts or income, such as the proceeds from asset sales.

	2007-08 £m	2008-09 £m	2009-10 £m	2010-11 £m
NI DEL	8,690.7	9,238.3	11,653.5	11,156.5
Regional Rates	519.9	607.4	547.1	537.9
RRI Borrowing	104.6	260.0	246.0	236.9
Other Items			8.0	0.4
Total DEL Expenditure	9,315.2	10,105.7	12,454.6	11,931.7

1 DOJ and PPS are included in these figures from 2009-10 onwards

2 Totals may not add due to rounding

The position reflected above is for the total NI DEL and associated expenditure. However, the NI DEL is subject to separate controls in terms of current expenditure and capital investment. In addition, the non cash elements within current expenditure are subject to a separate ring-fence.

Rating: Arrears

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what has been the total level of rates arrears in each of the last five years.

(AQW 9045/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The total level of rates arrears at the end of each year for the last five years (as published in the Land & Property Services Annual Report & Accounts) and the level in each District Council area are given in the table overleaf. The latest year for which information is available is for 2010/11 and the earliest year for which information is available at District Council level is for 2007/08.

DEBT AT END OF EACH YEAR (£ MILLIONS)

District Council	31st March 2011	31st March 2010	31st March 2009	31st March 2008	31st March 2007**
Antrim	3.982	4.086	2.915	2.782	
Ards	5.510	5.534	4.653	4.057	
Armagh	4.809	4.375	3.679	3.474	
Ballymena	3.668	3.599	2.900	3.259	
Ballymoney	1.348	1.328	1.019	1.087	
Banbridge	3.235	2.743	2.325	2.167	
Belfast	49.318	52.514	46.526	43.496	
Carrickfergus	2.759	2.622	2.528	1.603	
Castlereagh	3.443	4.614	2.891	3.647	
Coleraine	3.743	3.674	3.454	3.395	
Cookstown	1.482	1.426	1.345	1.612	
Craigavon	7.979	8.189	6.011	6.726	
Derry	9.746	10.094	9.682	8.332	
Down	4.727	5.627	4.202	3.966	
Dungannon & S.Tyrone	3.045	3.080	2.477	2.645	
Fermanagh	3.506	3.309	3.207	2.891	
Larne	1.494	1.454	1.595	1.310	
Limavady	2.027	1.881	1.683	1.355	
Lisburn	10.248	10.131	8.523	7.073	
Magherafelt	1.777	1.613	1.370	1.288	
Moyle	0.832	0.816	0.711	.583	
Newry & Mourne	9.236	8.587	6.989	6.521	
Newtownabbey	6.520	6.827	6.329	5.108	
North Down	6.907	7.199	5.314	4.905	
Omagh	2.214	2.986	2.311	2.659	
Strabane	2.269	2.160	2.479	2.056	
Unallocated to DC*	(0.283)	(3.507)	(0.649)	(4.218)	
Total	155.542	156.962	136.468	123.780	88.3

* Monies received but not allocated to individual ratepayer accounts.

** Analysis of end of year debt is not available at individual Council level.

Rating: Arrears

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the total level of rates arrears in each council area in each of the last five years.

(AQW 9046/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The total level of rates arrears at the end of each year for the last five years (as published in the Land & Property Services Annual Report & Accounts) and the level in each District Council area are given in the table overleaf. The latest year for which information is available is for 2010/11 and the earliest year for which information is available at District Council level is for 2007/08.

DEBT AT END OF EACH YEAR (£ MILLIONS)

District Council	31st March 2011	31st March 2010	31st March 2009	31st March 2008	31st March 2007**
Antrim	3.982	4.086	2.915	2.782	
Ards	5.510	5.534	4.653	4.057	
Armagh	4.809	4.375	3.679	3.474	
Ballymena	3.668	3.599	2.900	3.259	
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Banbridge	3.235	2.743	2.325	2.167	
Belfast	49.318	52.514	46.526	43.496	
Carrickfergus	2.759	2.622	2.528	1.603	
Castlereagh	3.443	4.614	2.891	3.647	
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Cookstown	1.482	1.426	1.345	1.612	
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Down	4.727	5.627	4.202	3.966	
Dungannon & S.Tyrone	3.045	3.080	2.477	2.645	
Fermanagh	3.506	3.309	3.207	2.891	
Larne	1.494	1.454	1.595	1.310	
Limavady	2.027	1.881	1.683	1.355	
Lisburn	10.248	10.131	8.523	7.073	
Magherafelt	1.777	1.613	1.370	1.288	
Moyle	0.832	0.816	0.711	.583	
Newry & Mourne	9.236	8.587	6.989	6.521	
Newtownabbey	6.520	6.827	6.329	5.108	
North Down	6.907	7.199	5.314	4.905	
Omagh	2.214	2.986	2.311	2.659	
Strabane	2.269	2.160	2.479	2.056	

District Council	31st March 2011	31st March 2010	31st March 2009	31st March 2008	31st March 2007**
Unallocated to DC*	(0.283)	(3.507)	(0.649)	(4.218)	
Total	155.542	156.962	136.468	123.780	88.3

* Monies receipted but not allocated to individual ratepayer accounts.

** Analysis of end of year debt is not available at individual Council level.

Cost of Division

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQO 1443/11-15, what actions his Department is taking to (i) tackle the cost of division; and (ii) reduce segregation.

(AQW 9057/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I refer the Member to the Hansard transcript of my response to AQO 1435/11-15 and to the written answer she received to AQO 1443/11-15.

Building Regulations

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he is considering transferring building regulations to the Department of the Environment; and, if so, when.

(AQW 9078/11-15)

Mr Wilson: There are no current plans to transfer building regulations to the Department for the Environment.

Civil Service: Job Applications

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, for each of the last three years, to detail (i) the number of applicants for jobs in the Civil Service, broken down by religious background; and (ii) of these, the percentage of successful applicants, broken down by religious background.

(AQW 9216/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Information on staff appointments to the Northern Ireland Civil Service has been published in annual reports on the website www.nicsrecruitment.gov.uk for the financial years 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2010 and for the period 1 January 2010 to 1 May 2011 at the following link [http://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/Analysis of NICS Recruitment Competitions 01Apr09 - 31Dec10.pdf](http://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/Analysis%20of%20NICS%20Recruitment%20Competitions%2001Apr09%20-%2031Dec10.pdf) The information includes occupational groups, gender, community background and declared disability.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Pseudomonas: Microbiological Standards

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the water microbiological testing regime in each hospital's neonatal unit (i) prior to the pseudomonas outbreak; and (ii) subsequent to the pseudomonas outbreak.

(AQW 8585/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I have commissioned an independent review of the recent tragic incidents of pseudomonas infection in neonatal units. The review is now underway and will be investigating the reasons for the incidents; actions taken, and lessons that need to be learned from the incidents.

At this stage I cannot comment on technical areas such as these that will form part of the investigations of the review team into the reasons for the incidents and actions taken.

I have asked for an interim report by the end of March so that urgent actions can be taken and have asked for the final report to be presented no more than eight weeks after the interim report at which time I will bring the report to the Assembly.

Pseudomonas: Microbiological Standards

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the bacteria which the water microbiological testing regime tested for in each hospital's neonatal unit (i) prior to the pseudomonas outbreak; and (ii) subsequent to the pseudomonas outbreak.

(AQW 8586/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have commissioned an independent review of the recent tragic incidents of pseudomonas infection in neonatal units. The review is now underway and will be investigating the reasons for the incidents; actions taken, and lessons that need to be learned from the incidents.

At this stage I cannot comment on technical areas such as these that will form part of the investigations of the review team into the reasons for the incidents and actions taken.

I have asked for an interim report by the end of March so that urgent actions can be taken and have asked for the final report to be presented no more than eight weeks after the interim report at which time I will bring the report to the Assembly.

Pseudomonas: Microbiological Standards

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the water microbiological testing regime for (i) fixtures and fittings; and (ii) taps in each hospital's neonatal unit (a) prior to the pseudomonas outbreak; and (b) subsequent to the pseudomonas outbreak.

(AQW 8587/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have commissioned an independent review of the recent tragic incidents of pseudomonas infection in neonatal units. The review is now underway and will be investigating the reasons for the incidents; actions taken, and lessons that need to be learned from the incidents.

At this stage I cannot comment on technical areas such as these that will form part of the investigations of the review team into the reasons for the incidents and actions taken.

I have asked for an interim report by the end of March so that urgent actions can be taken and have asked for the final report to be presented no more than eight weeks after the interim report at which time I will bring the report to the Assembly.

Malnutrition: Older People

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the malnutrition problem facing some older people.

(AQW 8642/11-15)

Mr Poots: The importance attached to the nutrition of adults of all ages has been recognized through the launch of "Promoting Good Nutrition – a strategy to improve the quality of nutritional care for adults in Northern Ireland" published by my Department in March 2011. The strategy is targeted at all health and social care settings, including people's own homes.

Ambulances: Average Travel Time

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the estimated ambulance travel time from (i) Ballycastle; (ii) Ballymoney; (iii) Rasharkin; (iv) Dunloy; (v) Loughgiel; (vi) Armoy; (vii) Carey; (viii) Ballintoy; and (ix) Cargan to the Causeway Hospital, Coleraine.

(AQW 8660/11-15)

Mr Poots: I must advise that NIAS cannot provide “estimated” ambulance travel times, but rather average ambulance travel times. The times provided below relate to emergency activity only for the period 01/01/2011 to 31/12/2011.

Location	Average Travel Time (min:sec)	Journeys Undertaken
Ballycastle	27:50	409
Ballymoney	14:32	1,078
Rasharkin	26:33	97
Dunloy	21:35	89
Loughgiel	29:25	11
Armoy	25:11	29
Ballintoy	22:20	7
Cargan	35:00	1
Carey	This area is not a “residential” area or ward, but relates to a Barony/Church Parish area and therefore NIAS cannot provide data.	

Source: NIAS

Ambulances: Average Travel Time

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the estimated ambulance travel time from (i) Ballycastle; (ii) Ballymoney; (iii) Rasharkin; (iv) Dunloy; (v) Loughgiel; (vi) Armoy; (vii) Carey; (viii) Ballintoy; and (ix) Cargan to the Antrim Area Hospital.

(AQW 8661/11-15)

Mr Poots: I must advise that NIAS cannot provide “estimated” ambulance travel times, but rather average ambulance travel times. The times provided below relate to emergency activity only for the period 01/01/2011 to 31/12/2011.

Location	Average Travel Time (min:sec)	Journeys Undertaken
Ballycastle	40:50	4
Ballymoney	34:01	7
Rasharkin	36:21	12
Dunloy	26:00	5
Loughgiel	n/a	0
Armoy	n/a	0
Ballintoy	n/a	0
Cargan	35:22	21
Carey	This area is not a “residential” area or ward, but relates to a Barony/Church Parish area and therefore NIAS cannot provide data.	

Source: NIAS

Care Homes: Complaints of Neglect/Abuse

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many complaints of neglect/abuse in care homes have been made to each Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8662/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information is not available in the form requested and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Family Planning Association: Funding

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail how the Family Planning Association has spent its allocated funds in each of the last three years, including (i) rent and rates; (ii) staff costs; (iii) marketing costs; and (iv) supplying free contraception.

(AQW 8668/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested in respect of core and project funding allocated by my Department to the Family Planning Association (FPA) in each of the past three years is set out in the table below:

YEAR	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Rent & Rates	£5,507.73	£5,729.65	£7,049.19
Staff Salaries & Other Related Costs	£100,298.97	£107,513.51	£117,249.06
Marketing/ Advertising Costs	£319.60	£1,524.96	£607.08
Supplying Free Contraception	NIL	NIL	NIL

The FPA also receives funding from Health and Social Care organisations however the information requested is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Children's Services: Cross-departmental Initiatives

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any cross-departmental commissioning of children's services.

(AQW 8695/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department does not commission services for children, jointly or otherwise. The Health and Social Care Board is responsible for commissioning health and social care services, resource management, performance management and service improvement. The recently established Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP), which is led by the Health and Social Care Board, has the capacity to jointly plan and commission services for all children and young people in Northern Ireland.

My Department is currently involved in a range of cross-departmental policy initiatives, supported by a range of statutory and voluntary sector partners, aimed at improving outcomes for children in all areas of their lives.

Prostate Cancer: Treatment Options

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what treatments are provided for people with advanced prostate cancer; and for his assessment of these treatments.

(AQW 8710/11-15)

Mr Poots: The HSC Board commissions a range of treatment from Trusts for patients with advanced prostate cancer. The specific treatment will vary according to the individual patient and the stage or severity of their disease. Treatments include surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy, and hormone therapy.

Clinically advanced localised cancer cannot normally be eradicated by surgery alone. The rate of progression of the disease varies considerably. Patients with locally advanced disease mainly receive radiotherapy or hormone therapy. Some men live for many years with few symptoms, whilst others develop extensive disease quite rapidly.

Integrated Care Partnerships

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) for a breakdown of the GP practices in each of the 17 Integrated Care Partnerships; and (ii) when the Partnerships will meet and which organisations or groups will be represented at any such meetings.

(AQW 8715/11-15)

Mr Poots: Integrated Care Partnerships are an important component of the future model for Integrated Health and Social Care set out in Transforming Your Care. They should build on the work of the 17 existing Primary Care Partnerships. The Integrated Care Partnerships will join together the full range of Health and Social Care services in each area, including GPs, community health, and social care providers, hospital specialists and representatives from the independent and voluntary sector. The Integrated Care Partnerships have not been created, though, it is important and my expectation that they become established and start operation over a short period of time.

Trade Union: Secondment

Mr McCallister asked Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of (a) full-time; and (b) part-time staff who are currently on secondment from his Department, or its arm's length bodies, to each recognised trade union; (ii) the salary scale for each secondee; and (iii) the length of each secondment to date.

(AQW 8779/11-15)

Mr Poots: In my Department there is (i) (a) 1 full-time member of staff seconded to NIPSA; (b) no part-time staff seconded to trade unions; (ii) salary range is £23,336 - £26,086; (iii) secondment period runs from 14 January 2008 to date.

This information in relation to my Department's arm's length bodies is not held centrally and could only be obtained from individual HSC bodies at a disproportionate cost.

Pseudomonas: Microbiological Standards

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the bacteria which the environmental microbiological testing regime routinely tested for in each hospital's neonatal unit (i) prior to the pseudomonas outbreak; and (ii) subsequent to the pseudomonas outbreak.

(AQW 8803/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have commissioned an independent review of the recent tragic incidents of pseudomonas infection in neonatal units. The review is now underway and will be investigating the reasons for the incidents; actions taken, and lessons that need to be learned from the incidents.

At this stage I cannot comment on technical areas such as these that will form part of the investigations of the review team into the reasons for the incidents and actions taken.

I have asked for an interim report by the end of March so that urgent actions can be taken and have asked for the final report to be presented no more than eight weeks after the interim report at which time I will bring the report to the Assembly.

Pseudomonas: Microbiological Standards

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the microbiological standards for (i) water; and (ii) fixtures and fittings in each hospital's neonatal unit (a) prior to the pseudomonas outbreak; and (b) subsequent to the pseudomonas outbreak.

(AQW 8805/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have commissioned an independent review of the recent tragic incidents of pseudomonas infection in neonatal units. The review is now underway and will be investigating the reasons for the incidents; actions taken, and lessons that need to be learned from the incidents.

At this stage I cannot comment on technical areas such as these that will form part of the investigations of the review team into the reasons for the incidents and actions taken.

I have asked for an interim report by the end of March so that urgent actions can be taken and have asked for the final report to be presented no more than eight weeks after the interim report at which time I will bring the report to the Assembly.

Pseudomonas: Microbiological Standards

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many microbiological results for (i) water testing; and (ii) environmental swabs in each hospital's neonatal unit were (a) a matter of concern; or (b) failed against prescribed standards, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8807/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have commissioned an independent review of the recent tragic incidents of pseudomonas infection in neonatal units. The review is now underway and will be investigating the reasons for the incidents; actions taken, and lessons that need to be learned from the incidents.

At this stage I cannot comment on technical areas such as these that will form part of the investigations of the review team into the reasons for the incidents and actions taken.

I have asked for an interim report by the end of March so that urgent actions can be taken and have asked for the final report to be presented no more than eight weeks after the interim report at which time I will bring the report to the Assembly.

Pseudomonas: Microbiological Standards

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether pseudomonas spp. was regularly tested for in the (i) water sources; and (ii) fixtures and fittings in each hospital's neonatal unit (a) prior to the pseudomonas outbreak; and (b) subsequent to the pseudomonas outbreak.

(AQW 8810/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have commissioned an independent review of the recent tragic incidents of pseudomonas infection in neonatal units. The review is now underway and will be investigating the reasons for the incidents; actions taken, and lessons that need to be learned from the incidents.

At this stage I cannot comment on technical areas such as these that will form part of the investigations of the review team into the reasons for the incidents and actions taken.

I have asked for an interim report by the end of March so that urgent actions can be taken and have asked for the final report to be presented no more than eight weeks after the interim report at which time I will bring the report to the Assembly.

Fire Station, Ballycastle: Capital Funding

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether capital funding will be made available for a fire station in Ballycastle within the next three years.

(AQW 8866/11-15)

Mr Poots: Due to capital funding constraints, I do not anticipate funding being made available to Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) within the next three years for this project. Should the Executive make additional capital funding available to my Department, I will reconsider this decision in light of operational and strategic priorities for NIFRS and the wider Department.

GP Surgeries: 0844 Numbers

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he has taken to prevent GPs using 0844 telephone numbers as the only means by which their surgeries can be contacted. **(AQW 8872/11-15)**

Mr Poots: There are 23 Practices (6%) out of the 355 GP practices that use 0844 telephone numbers. Patients contacting a practice using a 0844 number should not incur charges above the equivalent of a local call.

In September 2011, the Department issued a letter to the HSC Board outlining the policy in relation to the use of the 0844 number. The HSC Board, at the Department's request, wrote to all practices in October 2011 and again in February 2012 to advise them of their responsibilities in relation to the use of 0844 numbers. Practices were advised that if, having taken all reasonable steps, it is not possible to ensure that the patient would pay no more than they would to a local geographical number, they must consider introducing a system under which if a caller asks to be called back the practice should do so at its own expense. Practices were also advised that they should not enter into, renew or extend contracts for telephone services unless they were satisfied that patients would not pay more than they would to call a local geographical number.

I would emphasise that in specific cases where patients have an issue regarding the cost of the calls in contacting their GP practice they should take this up directly with the relevant GP practice, which is responsible for providing the service.

Social Care: Residential Homes

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 7781/11-15, to outline the reasons why there was a significant difference in the average cost per person to stay in statutory residential homes in 2010/11 compared with independent/private care homes. **(AQW 8885/11-15)**

Mr Poots: The cost differential is primarily attributable to the method used by each sector in determining their average cost per person per week.

The costs provided for statutory residential care homes represent the average unit costs for one week's care regardless of the category and extent of care provided in the home. The cost includes the direct and indirect costs not only of the home but also a portion of trust overhead costs, including capital charges and other trust services which are provided in the home.

The costs of the independent sector relate solely to the weekly charge to an individual of a week's residence in the home averaged over the annual duration of occupied weeks.

Social Care: Residential Homes

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 7781/11-15, given the significant difference in the cost of keeping people in statutory care homes compared with independent/private care homes, whether he intends to carry out a review of care home placements to ensure cost effective placements and that people are receiving the most appropriate care. **(AQW 8886/11-15)**

Mr Poots: I recognise the need to ensure that resources are used in the most efficient and effective way possible. To that end, I have agreed a process of reform to establish the future direction and funding of adult social care, which will include issues such as the cost effectiveness of care and who provides it. The process has begun and a discussion paper will be issued shortly for public consultation

to promote awareness of challenges facing social care and, consequently, consensus on the need for change.

Psychiatric Unit: Windsor House, Belfast City Hospital

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) why there has been a reduction in the number of beds in the acute psychiatric unit at Windsor House, Belfast City Hospital; and (ii) the long-term plans for Windsor House.

(AQW 8901/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust along with other Trusts are reducing dependence on beds as alternatives to inpatient care, such as Acute Home Treatment services are being developed. This enables services users to have their acute care in their own home or within the Home Treatment service.

Following a full public consultation process, the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust has submitted a business case to the DHSSPS for the development of a new 80 bedded acute mental health inpatient unit on the current Windsor House site.

Fire Station: Newcastle

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on plans for a new fire station in Newcastle.

(AQW 8908/11-15)

Mr Poots: There are no plans at present for a new fire station in Newcastle. It remains one of 26 Fire Stations identified by the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service Strategic Development Plan as needing to be replaced.

Hospital: Enniskillen

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list the 76 names that were suggested for the new hospital in Enniskillen.

(AQW 8922/11-15)

Mr Poots: The suggested names are as follows:

Wolfe Lake Hospital	Inis Ceithleann Hospital
Border South-west Hospital	Ceithleann's Island Hospital
Erne Hospital	University Teaching Hospital
Cross County Hospital (a principal for your health needs) (The)	Koinonia Hospital... family hospital where you feel welcomed
Erne Hospital (The)	South West County Hospital
SW General Hospital (The)	South West United Hospital
Sperrin Lakeland (The)	South West General [This was included twice in overall list of 76 names]
Lakeland Sperrin Hospital	St Michaels South West Acute Hospital
Central Hospital (The)	Gordon Wilson South West Acute Hospital
Feryone Hospital of the SW	St Molaise
Hospital SOUTH WEST	Tyrone Infermanaghry

South West Acute Hospital [This was included twice in overall list of 76 names]	Silveroak Hospital
South West Hospital	Lakelands Hospital
Rural Hospital Enniskillen	South West University Teaching Hospital
Rural Hospital	Lough Erne General
Derryargon	New Hope Hospital (The)
Silverwood	New Hope Hospital
Devenish	Sperrin Lakeland Hospital
Culdeas	South West Hospital (The)
South West Area Hospital	Princess Catherine Hospital
Sperrin Lakeland Acute Hospital (The)	Western General Hospital
St Luke's Hospital	St Catherine Hospital
Wilson Monaghan Acute Hospital	Lakeview
Lakeview Southwest	Lochview
Lakeside Acute Hospital	Wolfe Lough Hospital Enniskillen
North Western	Greenfield(s)
Garden of Healing (The Garden)	Greenland(s)
WestGold	Cherrymount
South Western Area	Heron View
Burkitt's	Beechview
The South West Area Hospital	Hilltop
Drumcoo Hospital	Hillside
Wolfe Lough Health Care	Island(s) (The)
Lakeland Hospital	Islandview (The)
South West General Hospital	Enniskillen Area Hospital
Lough side General Hospital	Western Valley Hospital
Century One General	Hope Hospital

Dental Services: County Fermanagh

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of Health Service dental provision in Co. Fermanagh.

(AQW 8924/11-15)

Mr Poots: I consider that the availability of Health Service dentistry in Co. Fermanagh is currently sufficient to meet needs. Following a tender for the provision of additional dental services taken forward by my Department and the HSC Board, Oasis Dental Care opened 14 dental practices throughout Northern Ireland, including a new 6 dentist practice in Enniskillen. This practice is currently registering new Health Service patients.

Pharmaceutical Contractors Committee: Judicial Review

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much the judicial review, brought in 2008 and decided in 2010, in relation to the Pharmaceutical Contractors Committee cost his Department, including (a) the total legal costs incurred; and (b) the legal costs his Department had to pay to the Committee.

(AQW 8963/11-15)

Mr Poots: The judicial review, brought in 2008 and decided in 2010, in relation to the Pharmaceutical Contractors Committee cost my Department (a) £152,791.04, including VAT; in total legal costs including (b) legal costs of £119,588.70, including VAT, which the Department had to pay to the Committee.

Obesity

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what progress his Department has made in halting the rise in obesity; and (ii) the number of people who are currently deemed to be obese, broken down by (a) gender; and (b) age.

(AQW 8965/11-15)

Mr Poots: In 2007, the Department published the Fit Futures Implementation Plan to tackle the rising prevalence in childhood obesity. The Department has now developed a Framework for Preventing and Addressing Overweight and Obesity in Northern Ireland 2012-2022:

- (i) A Fitter Future for All which aims to tackle the issue of overweight and obesity throughout the entire life course of the population and will be launched on 9th March 2012. Implementation of the non-departmental outcomes within the Framework will be taken forward by the Public Health Agency.

The following information is presented by percentage: The Health and Social Wellbeing Survey (HSWB) 2005/06 recorded 8% of children aged 2-15 as obese and 24% of adults aged 16+ as obese. The Health Survey in Northern Ireland (HSNI) 2010/11 also recorded 8% of children aged 2-15 as obese and 23% of adults aged 16+ as obese. The most recent survey indicates that we have managed to halt the rise in obesity but that a continued and sustained focus on the addressing the obesogenic environment remains a high priority.

- (ii) The Health Survey Northern Ireland 2010/11 collected information on the height and weight of individuals, aged 2 and over. The classification of obesity differs for adults and children and for this reason the results are presented separately below.

Adults

- a) Table 1 below outlines the proportion of adults (aged 16+) classified as obese, from the 2010/11 Health Survey Northern Ireland. The figures have been broken down by gender.

TABLE 1: OBESITY LEVEL BY GENDER

	Male	Female	Total
Obese	23%	23%	23%

Source: Health Survey Northern Ireland 2010/11

- b) Table 2 below outlines the proportion of adults (aged 16+) classified as obese, from the 2010/11 Health Survey Northern Ireland. The figures have been broken down by age-group.

TABLE 2: OBESITY LEVEL BY AGE-GROUP

	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	Total
Obese	12%	16%	25%	29%	30%	27%	23%

Source: Health Survey Northern Ireland 2010/11

Children

- a) Table 3 below outlines the proportion of children (aged 2-15) classified as obese, from the 2010/11 Health Survey Northern Ireland. The information is based on the International Obesity Task Force guidelines. The figures have been broken down by gender.

TABLE 3: OBESITY LEVEL BY GENDER

	Boys	Girls	Total
Obese	8%	9%	8%

Source: Health Survey Northern Ireland 2010/11

- b) Table 4 below outlines the proportion of children (aged 2-15) classified as obese, from the 2010/11 Health Survey Northern Ireland. The information is based on the International Obesity Task Force guidelines. The figures have been broken down by age-group.

TABLE 4: OBESITY LEVEL BY AGE-GROUP

	2-10	11-15	Total (2-15)
Obese	10%	5%	8%

Source: Health Survey Northern Ireland 2010/11

Parental Alcohol/Drug Dependency: Children at Risk

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what progress his Department has made in achieving a 10 percent reduction in the number of children at risk of parental alcohol and/or drug dependency; and (ii) to provide a breakdown of the current number of children at risk by (a) gender; and (b) age.

(AQW 8966/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) It has been estimated that there could be as many as 40,000 children living in a family where there is an alcohol problem in Northern Ireland. It is also likely that a significant number of young people are living with parents or carers who are problem drug users. This issue is often referred to as Hidden Harm – as these young people may not be known to services; and they often do not know where to turn for help.

The New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs recognises this important issue, and this Department developed a Regional Action Plan to address this issue in 2008. The Public Health Agency and the Health and Social Care Board subsequently developed a joint implementation plan to drive this forward. Priorities include planning/commissioning and integrated working, including the rollout of a regional protocol; development of specialist services for children/young people; safeguarding children's welfare; workforce development; and research & evaluation.

Importantly, in support of the joint implementation plan, the Health and Social Care Sector has allocated over £700,000 to schemes which either fully or partially undertake work to support children and young people at risk of Hidden Harm.

- (ii) Given the sensitive and discreet nature of this issue, it has been very difficult to put in place a robust measure on the number of children at risk of parental alcohol and/or drug dependency. Work is underway to look at this in more detail, but currently this information is not available.

Suicide: Reduction

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what progress his Department has made in achieving a minimum of 15 percent reduction in the suicide rate; and (ii) to provide a breakdown of the most recent suicide rate by (a) gender; and (b) age.

(AQW 8967/11-15)

Mr Poots:

From 2006 a range of actions, based on international evidence of best practice, have been progressed as part of the implementation of the Protect Life strategy. These include:

- (i) training on suicide/mental health awareness; community-led suicide prevention/bereavement support services; local research into suicide; Deliberate Self Harm Registry in A&E Units; Lifeline 24/7 crisis response helpline; and programmes targeted at vulnerable young men.

Suicide is a societal issue, and given recent trends in suicide rates, it is most unlikely that the 15% reduction target will be achieved. The refreshed Protect Life strategy, which is due for publication shortly, will include a number of new objectives/actions which will in future allow for a more balanced assessment of the wider impact of the strategy.

- (ii) I have detailed below a breakdown of the latest 3 year rolling average suicide rate per 100,000 population by both gender and age.

AGE GROUP

	Under 20	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80 +
Females								
2008-10	2.6	9.5	7.5	15.1	8.3	6.1	4.3	1.6
Males								
2008-10	6.7	41.0	37.7	41.7	27.2	18.8	13.3	17.9

Births: Teenage Mothers

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what progress his Department has made in achieving a 40 percent reduction in the number of births to mothers who are under 17 years old; and (ii) how many mothers under 17 years old have given birth in the last 12 months, broken down by age.

(AQW 8968/11-15)

Mr Poots: The latest data (2008-2010) indicates that the rate of births to teenage mothers aged under 17 years has reduced by 27% to date from the baseline rate of 4.1 births per 1,000 females (1998-2000). The target uses a three year rolling average to analyse the data.

The provisional number of births to mothers under 17 years in the last 12 months, broken down by age, is set out below:

NUMBER OF RESIDENT LIVE BIRTHS TO MOTHERS AGED UNDER 17 BY AGE, Q4 2010-Q3 2011P

Age of Mother Total Under 17	Number of Resident Live Births Registered Total 112
13	1
14	2
15	26

Age of Mother Total Under 17	Number of Resident Live Births Registered Total 112
16	83

P Data for 2011 remains provisional until the publication of the 2011 Annual Report of the Registrar General due to be released in November 2012

Tobacco Control Strategy

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how he plans to tailor the Tobacco Control Strategy towards people under 18 years old, as they are the least likely to get involved in such a scheme.

(AQW 8972/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is recognised in the new Tobacco Control Strategy that the majority of smokers become addicted to tobacco whilst still in their teens. Children and young people are, therefore, identified as a priority group for specific intervention. The Public Health Agency has been tasked with developing a comprehensive action plan for the strategy. The Agency will establish a multi-sectoral implementation group to assist in this work. This group will develop actions aimed at effectively engaging with children and young people.

An initial priority for the Implementation Group will be the development of innovative education and awareness raising programmes aimed at preventing young people from taking up smoking. Preventative measures will be complemented by the provision of tailored smoking cessation services in settings convenient to under eighteens who are already smokers.

In addition, a number of legislative controls, aimed at reducing the uptake of smoking by young people, have recently been introduced or are imminent. These include: a ban on the sale of tobacco from vending machines; a ban on the display of tobacco products in retail outlets; and tougher sanctions for retailers who persistently flout the law with regards to underage sales of tobacco products.

Cancer: Young People

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many young people aged between 16 and 24 were diagnosed with cancer in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8975/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information regarding the number of people aged between 16 and 24 years old who were diagnosed with cancer (ICD-101 C00-C97) in N. Ireland in the years 2006 to 2010, by year of diagnosis, is given in the table below;

Year of diagnosis	Number of people	
	All people with cancer (C00-C97)	People with cancer excluding non-melanoma skin cancer (C00-C97 excluding C44)²
2006	56	51
2007	78	66
2008	63	58
2009	74	60
2010	71	64

- 1 For a listing and explanation of ICD-10 codes see International Classification of Diseases for Oncology, 3rd Edition, World Health Organisation, Geneva, 2000. For an explanation of ICD-10 codes see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_ICD-10_codes.
- 2 Non-melanoma skin cancer (C44) is a malignant disease that is very common but rarely fatal, and is often excluded from cancer statistics when assessing cancer burden in the community.

Cancer: Young People

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the average survival rate for young people with cancer aged between 16 and 24.

(AQW 8977/11-15)

Mr Poots: The following table includes information regarding the observed survival of people (n=282) aged between 16 and 24 years old who were diagnosed with cancer (ICD-101 C00-C97 excluding C442) in N. Ireland in the years 2001 to 2005 and followed-up till the end of 2010;

Years after diagnosis	Survival of patients (%) and 95% confidence interval	
1	92.6%	(89.0%–95.0%)
2	87.5%	(83.1%–90.8%)
3	85.4%	(80.7%–88.9%)
4	84.1%	(79.3%–87.8%)
5	82.9%	(78.0%–86.8%)

- 1 For a listing and explanation of ICD-10 codes see International Classification of Diseases for Oncology, 3rd Edition, World Health Organisation, Geneva, 2000. For an explanation of ICD-10 codes see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_ICD-10_codes.
- 2 Non-melanoma skin cancer (C44) is a malignant disease that is very common but rarely fatal, and is often excluded from cancer statistics when assessing cancer burden in the community.

Cancer: Young People

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the types of cancer that have affected young people aged between 16 and 24 in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8978/11-15)

Mr Poots: The table below includes information regarding the types of cancer (ICD-101 C00-C97) diagnosed in people aged between 16 and 24 years old in N. Ireland in the years 2008 to 2010, by type of cancer and year of incidence;

Cancer site	Incidence		
	2008	2009	2010
Lymphoma (C81-C85)	13	13	14
Malignant melanoma (C43)	6	6	11
Non-melanoma skin (C44)	5	14	9
Testis (C62)	11	9	8
Cervix (C53)	6	6	0
Brain and other CNS (C70-C72)	<5	8	5
Leukaemia (C91-C95)	6	<5	<5

Cancer site	Incidence		
	2008	2009	2010
Other malignant cancer ³	19	20	22

- 1 For a listing and explanation of ICD-10 codes see International Classification of Diseases for Oncology, 3rd Edition, World Health Organisation, Geneva, 2000. For an explanation of ICD-10 codes see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_ICD-10_codes.
- 2 To protect patient confidentiality the number in cells marked '<5' is concealed.
- 3 Other malignant cancer' included the following cancer sites: Bone (C40,C41), Thyroid (C73), Colorectal (C18-C21), Head and Neck (C00-C14, C30-C32), Other malignant cancer, Connective/soft tissue (C47,C49), Ovary (C56), Kidney (C64-C66,C68), Stomach (C16),Lung (C33,C34), Breast (C50), Uterus (C54-C55), Oesophagus (C15), Vulva (C51), Bladder (C67).

Smoking: Private Vehicles

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the consultation will be published on people smoking in cars carrying children.

(AQW 8979/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is my intention to go out to public consultation in the early summer on a range of options around banning smoking in private vehicles.

Officials in my Department are in the process of meeting with relevant stakeholders to discuss the potential impacts of such a ban and these discussions are helping to inform the development of a comprehensive consultation package. The consultation exercise will also seek views on issues around implementation and enforcement.

Sex Offenders: Children's Barred List

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many sex offenders are currently registered on the Independent Safeguarding Authority's Children's Barred List under the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007.

(AQW 9006/11-15)

Mr Poots: When a person accepts a caution or is convicted of a relevant offence they are automatically barred by the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) from working/volunteering with children and/or vulnerable adults. Depending on the offence, the person may be permitted to make representations to be removed from the barred list(s). In addition the ISA considers allegations of sexual abuse under its discretionary powers.

The ISA has confirmed that it has included 241 individuals in the Children's Barred List under the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007. Of these, 195 individuals (81%) were considered in relation to a sexual related offence or allegation.

Benefit Entitlement Checks

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) why Phase II of the Benefit Entitlement Checks, under the Maximizing Access in Rural Areas (MARA) Project, will not be tendered; (ii) the budget for the MARA project; (iii) whether an independent evaluation of Phase II has been undertaken; (iv) whether an assessment has been carried out to provide a rationale for the decision not to tender for Phase II; and (v) how learning from Phase I has been incorporated into the service delivery model.

(AQW 9014/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) The benefit entitlement checks, (BECs) under the maximising access in rural areas project will not be tendered as the Social Security Agency will undertake the benefit checks in Phase II.
- (ii) The budget for the MARA project is £2.928 million in total (2011- 2015).
- (iii) An independent evaluation of Phase I was completed by Deloitte in August 2011. Phase II has recently commenced and an independent evaluation will be commissioned in 2014/15
- (iv) The rationale for the decision not to tender for Phase II is as follows:
 - In keeping with the Northern Ireland Guide to expenditure, appraisal and evaluation government departments should carry out assignments where it has the necessary skills and resources to do so. In this case the SSA can provide the requisite service and in doing so this strengthens the interdepartmental approach to this significant regional project.
 - To optimise successful tracking of specific and overall outcomes for the MARA project. The evaluation noted the problems tracking referrals for Phase 1 and the need to clearly measure outcomes in Phase II.
- (v) The following learning from the Phase 1 has been incorporated into MARA.
 - A community development approach in the identification of those households most in need continues to be strengthened and deployed.
 - A formal household identification partnership agreement with Lead Organisations as part of the tender process has been established to ensure early buy in at local community level to the project.
 - An Information Technology (IT) system has been developed for data collection, to expedite onward referrals automatically on a weekly basis to a range of referral partners and to ensure outcome measurement directly from referral agencies. The IT system will also facilitate regular monitoring and reporting for the MARA project.
 - Robust selection criteria for the formal recruitment of enablers on an “as and when” contract has been developed.
 - More focused and interactive training has also been developed for enablers.
 - A marketing plan for the MARA project is currently being developed and the launch of the MARA Project on the 15th March is the first phase of this marketing plan.
 - A second household visit to at least 80% of households approximately 8-12 weeks after initial visit has been incorporated into the project to ensure that the needs of the householder identified at the first visit have been fully pursued.

Life Expectancy

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress his Department has made in facilitating a 50 percent reduction in life the expectancy differential between the most disadvantaged areas and other areas.

(AQW 9016/11-15)

Mr Poots: There are many inter- related factors which impact on health. Health inequalities are wholly or partly a result of differences in the wider socio economic circumstances of people’s lives. Reducing health inequalities and closing the life expectancy gap between the most disadvantaged areas and other areas is therefore a challenge which goes beyond the remit of Health, and requires long-term coordinated effort.

Northern Ireland - much like other parts of the UK - continues to experience differences in health and wellbeing outcomes. Despite increases in life expectancy across all areas, improvements in the 20% most deprived areas were lower than those seen across NI as a whole. Latest information against the targets for male and female life expectancy therefore indicates a widening of the life expectancy gap against the baseline position (female gap increased by 0.2 years and male gap increased 1.1 years) for those living in disadvantaged areas against the Northern Ireland average.

Tackling health inequalities is an ongoing challenge and that is why my department is in the process of leading the development of a new public health strategic framework which will seek cross-departmental and cross-sectoral support for updated focus on public health priorities, including addressing the social determinants of health.

Smoking: Reduction

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what progress his Department has made reducing the number of adults who smoke to 21 percent; and (ii) to provide the latest available data on the number of adults who smoke, broken down by (a) age; and (b) gender.

(AQW 9018/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) In spite of a range of initiatives funded by my Department and delivered by the Public Health Agency, adult smoking prevalence rates in Northern Ireland have remained at around 24% since 2007. Reducing smoking prevalence remains a priority for my Department and I have recently launched a new strategy which sets the strategic direction for tobacco control and smoking reduction for the next decade.

There have been significant achievements in recent years, including the introduction of smoke-free legislation, the expansion smoking cessation services and increasing uptake of these services, and the introduction of legislation aimed at preventing children and young people from accessing tobacco. This has resulted in greater protection for the entire population from second-hand smoke and improved support for thousands of smokers wishing to quit.

Smoking, as is the case with most lifestyle behaviours, is influenced by a wide range of social factors many of which are beyond the remit of the health and social care sector. These include poverty, unemployment, and low educational attainment. Progress on addressing these issues would assist in reducing population smoking prevalence.

- (ii) The Health Survey Northern Ireland 2010/11 collected information on smoking prevalence and set out below, in tables 1 and 2 respectively, are the proportion of adults (aged 16+) who currently smoke by age and gender;

TABLE 1: SMOKING PREVALENCE BY AGE-GROUP

	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	Total
Currently smoke	26%	34%	24%	26%	23%	11%	24%

TABLE 2: SMOKING PREVALENCE BY GENDER

	Male	Female	Total
Currently smoke	25%	23%	24%

Source: Health Survey Northern Ireland 2010/11

Smoking: Manual Workers

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what progress his Department has made in reducing the number of manual workers who smoke to 25 percent; and (ii) to provide the latest available data on the number of manual workers who smoke, broken down by (a) age; and (b) gender.

(AQW 9020/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) The manual workers subset of the population has proved to be the most resistant to measures aimed at reducing smoking prevalence, with the latest statistics revealing that 31% of this group

are current smokers. While this figure has come down from 35% in 2003 when my Department's previous Tobacco Action Plan was published, it remains unacceptably high.

My Department's new Tobacco Control Strategy, which I recently launched, sets the strategic direction for tobacco control and smoking reduction for the next decade. In this document, disadvantaged people, including manual workers, have been identified as a key priority group. The Public Health Agency, in drawing up an action plan to accompany the new strategy, will set out a number of dedicated actions in an effort to further reduce smoking prevalence amongst manual workers. Improving access to specialist smoking cessation services will be a key component of this.

Smoking, as is the case with most lifestyle behaviours, is influenced by a wide range of social factors many of which are beyond the remit of the health and social care sector. These include poverty, unemployment, and low educational attainment. Progress on addressing these issues would greatly assist in reducing smoking prevalence amongst the manual workers subset.

- (ii) The Health Survey Northern Ireland 2010/11 collected information on smoking prevalence and set out below, in tables 1 and 2 respectively, are the proportion of manual workers (aged 16+) who currently smoke by age and gender;

TABLE 1: MANUAL WORKERS SMOKING PREVALENCE BY AGE-GROUP

	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	Total
Currently smoke	40%	45%	31%	33%	29%	15%	31%

Please note that within the 16-24 year old age-group, 40% of respondents did not have a socio-economic group assigned. For the other age-groups, the proportions were less than 5%.

TABLE 2: MANUAL WORKERS SMOKING PREVALENCE BY GENDER

	Male	Female	Total
Currently smoke	32%	30%	31%

Source: Health Survey Northern Ireland 2010/11

Dermatology Appointments: Waiting Time

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 8193/11-15, to detail (i) the number of dermatology appointments requested; and (ii) the annual appointment capacity for each Health and Social Care Trust area in each of the last three years.

(AQW 9027/11-15)

Mr Poots: The most robust and regionally consistent measure of required appointments over the last three years is the number of referrals received by Health and Social Care Trusts for a first outpatient appointment. Similarly, the combined number of first outpatient attendances and missed first outpatient appointments provides the most robust and regionally consistent measure of annual capacity over this period.

The number of referrals received, by each HSC Trust, for a first outpatient appointment in the Dermatology specialty during 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11 is outlined in the table below:

Total number of referrals received for a first outpatient appointment in the Dermatology specialty, by HSC Trust: 2008/09 to 2010/11

HSC Trust	Financial Year		
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Belfast	11,713	12,503	12,305
Northern	9,838	9,977	9,749
Southern	9,358	8,608	10,197
South Eastern	9,708	10,863	10,051
Western	7,417	7,851	7,958
Total Northern Ireland	48,034	49,802	50,260

Source: Health and Social Care Board

1 Number of referrals has been provided as an indicator of the number of appointments requested

The combined number of first outpatient attendances and missed first outpatient appointments in the Dermatology specialty at each HSC Trust during 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11 are outlined in the table below:

Total number of first outpatient attendances and missed first outpatient appointments in the Dermatology specialty, by HSC Trust: 2008/09 to 2010/11, 2, 3

HSC Trust	Financial Year		
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Belfast	8,921	9,189	8,685
Northern	6,864	5,145	4,466
Southern	8,374	7,980	7,472
South Eastern	6,434	4,604	4,610
Western	6,481	6,443	6,817
Total Northern Ireland	37,074	33,361	32,050

Source: Departmental Quarterly Outpatient Activity Return

- 2 The combined number of first outpatient attendances and missed first outpatient appointments have been provided as an indicator of appointment capacity.
- 3 Data includes activity undertaken as part of a waiting list initiative, but excludes activity provided by the Independent Sector.

Causeway Hospital, Coleraine: Viability

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what steps he has taken to enhance the viability of the new Causeway Hospital, Coleraine; and (ii) whether he will make a statement in relation to this matter.

(AQW 9039/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Causeway Hospital, opened in 2001, provides 24/7 acute hospital services to the local Causeway community. I am aware of recent concerns regarding the future of the hospital and can confirm that there are no plans to alter its acute status.

You will be aware, however, that the recent review of health and social care services in Northern Ireland has made it clear that significant changes will be required to our health service. It is too soon to say exactly what the future configuration of services will look like, or the implications for individual

hospitals, but our aim must be to have safe, resilient and sustainable services with the focus on the individual and not the institution.

Local Commissioning Groups will draw up specific proposals for hospitals in their area which meet the principles and criteria laid down by the review team and I am committed to consulting fully on any major reconfiguration of services which I intend to take forward.

Diabetes Provision: Audit

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether an audit on diabetes provision has been carried out, similar to the National Diabetes Paediatric Audit which was carried out in England,
(AQW 9049/11-15)

Mr Poots: Within Northern Ireland a number of regional audits for diabetes services provision have been undertaken, including an audit of diabetes education published in 2008 and currently being updated and a regional audit of hospital care undertaken in conjunction with Co-Operation and Working Together (CAWT) in 2010. Confidential enquiries into maternal and child health and pregnancy outcomes with diabetes have also been conducted.

In 2009 the Diabetes Consultant Group in Northern Ireland was allowed to use the National Diabetes Audit template to complete a Northern Ireland submission. The results were analysed by the clinician in charge of the exercise, who provided the results for Northern Ireland. The intention is to do a similar exercise at intervals.

In addition, each HSC Trust has computer systems for adults and children with diabetes to allow them to conduct audits of their patients.

The Report of the HSC Review 'Transforming Your Care' identifies long term conditions, such as diabetes, as a key area for health and social care. To ensure the highest quality services for people with diabetes, I have asked officials in my Department to initiate a review to consider the provision of existing services and emerging priorities in order to inform the development of a strategic and co-ordinated approach to improving services for people with diabetes.

Ulster Hospital, Dundonald: External Consultancy Fees

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much has been spent on external consultancy fees for patients at the Ulster Hospital, Dundonald, who were referred to the Fitzwilliam Clinic, Belfast in the last year.
(AQW 9052/11-15)

Mr Poots: During 2010/11 (latest information available) all referrals to the Fitzwilliam Clinic, Belfast from the Ulster Hospital, Dundonald were in respect of plastics outpatients services.

The total paid to the Fitzwilliam Clinic for the plastics outpatient service for the financial year 2010/11 was £366,628.

The Regional Plastics Outpatients Referral Centre is based at the Ulster Hospital, Dundonald (South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust) and in that context, all such referrals would be for patients from across Northern Ireland.

NICE Technology Appraisals/Clinical Guidelines

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the new policy introduced in September 2011, on the implementation of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) Technology Appraisals and Clinical Guidelines, what action (i) his Department; and (ii) the Health and Social Care Board has taken to ensure that patients and clinicians are able to access NICE approved treatments and procedures.

(AQW 9053/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- i As set out in circular HSC (SQSD) NICE 04/11, in the majority of cases, my Department has reviewed and endorsed NICE guidance within the agreed timescales of four weeks for Technology Appraisals and eight weeks for Clinical Guidelines.

Additionally, my securing of funds in the October Monitoring round allowed the Health and Social Care Board to ensure that patients can access certain new NICE-approved drugs and treatments .

- ii. As part of the new process, the HSC Board is required to submit to the Department a commissioning plan (in the case of Technology Appraisals) or Board response (in the case of Clinical Guidelines) within 15 weeks of the confirmed receipt of endorsement.

The commissioning plans and Board responses will set out the Board's strategy for implementing the guidance in the context of resources available and other HSC priorities.

The first of these responses and plans are to be submitted to my Department shortly and once agreed, they will form the formal Departmental policy position on implementation.

Northern Ireland Electronic Care Record Outline Business Case: Software Companies

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 8019/11-15, to detail (i) the rationale behind the decision to follow the HSCNI Technology Partner Agreement Framework Contract with Hewlett Packard for this project; (ii) the number and names of the companies that were initially selected to participate in the procurement process; (iii) when the procurement process began; (iv) the criteria used to determine the selection; (v) which companies were short-listed; (vi) the short-listing process; (vii) the areas the Health and Social Care Board and/or his Department are currently discussing with the companies; and (viii) the procurement process.

(AQW 9061/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information sought is as follows:

- i in considering the options, the Electronic Care Record (ECR) project used a scored criteria comprising value for money, resources required to complete the procurement, timescales, the extent to which direct engagement with potential suppliers was allowed for, and procurement flexibility. The process is documented in the Procurement Strategy 'Northern Ireland Electronic Care Record Procurement Strategy'. Having adopted the assessment and evaluation approach set out in the Strategy, it was concluded that the preferred option was to procure the ECR software and related services through the Technology Partner Agreement's Procurement Service;
- ii. the companies initially selected to participate in the procurement process were:
- | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| ■ Axsys Technology | ■ Intersystems |
| ■ Carefx | ■ iSoft |
| ■ csamhealth | ■ Microsoft |
| ■ dbMotion | ■ Oracle |
| ■ Enline | ■ Orion Health |
| ■ Graphnet | ■ Restart Consulting |
| ■ IBM | |
- iii. as part of the 'project start-up' phase, preparation for procurement and development of the Procurement Strategy took place in June-November 2011. The Procurement Strategy received Project Board approval on 22 September 2011, and a Pre-Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ) was distributed to an agreed long list of bidders on 10 October 2011;
- iv. the longlist of bidders receiving the PQQ was limited to suppliers of a commercially available ECR product, based on the Northern Ireland ECR Project Team's market assessment of potential solutions, and to suppliers who had previously expressed an interest in the Project;

the following Suppliers submitted PQQs:

- v Axsys Technology; csamhealth; dbMotion; Intersystems; and Orion Health;
- vi. the PQQ responses were evaluated in terms of the relevant technical knowledge and experience shown, capability/capacity, and organisational and financial standing. Three bidders (Orion Health, Intersystems and csamhealth) distinguished themselves as clearly better than their rivals;
- vii. the shortlisted companies are currently preparing their full tender responses to the ECR requirements. Limited dialogue, in order to clarify any legal, financial or technical queries the bidders have, may take place at this juncture; and
- viii. I understand that this point relates to the Technology Partner Agreement. This is a framework agreement aimed at providing an efficient and effective route to procure a broad range of ICT equipment and services. The framework was awarded to Hewlett Packard in August 2009 following a fully compliant OJEU procurement under the Public Contract Regulations 2006 and conducted using the competitive dialogue procedure provided for in those Regulations. The framework was let for a period of four years, and is due for renewal in 2013.

Liver Function Tests

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on how many occasions (i) Social Services has required parents to take a liver function test; and (ii) children have been removed from their parents because of liver function test results.

(AQW 9067/11-15)

Mr Poots: Health and Social Care Trusts cannot require or compel anyone to take a liver function test, and figures on children removed from their parents because of liver function test results are not available.

Rare Diseases

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have been diagnosed with a rare disease in each Health and Social Care Trust area, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 9096/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on the number of people that have been diagnosed with a rare disease in each of the last five years is not available.

Northern Ireland Electronic Care Record Outline Business Case: Software Companies

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 8018/11-15, given that the Electronic Care Records (ECR) Project's proof of concept was for a view only portal that provided Health and Social Care professionals with a unified view of data from a variety of existing clinical information systems (i) why only the four top scoring companies in the tender exercise were contacted to provide costs for a project to implement a clinical portal to provide full ECR functionality and scope across hospitals; (ii) who made this decision; (iii) when this decision was made; (iv) how the four companies scored, broken down by each section; and (v) to detail the high level scoping document and ECR costs template provided to the companies.

(AQW 9119/11-15)

Mr Poots: The top six companies from the Northern Ireland Electronic Care Record (NIECR) Proof of Concept pre qualification process were asked to provide costs, with five suppliers providing information.

It was considered that the inclusion of the costs of four suppliers was sufficient to inform the cost assumptions in the Outline Business Case, prior to the commencement of a new procurement process for the regional NIECR project. The decision to use the cost assumptions of these suppliers was taken by the Electronic Care Record Project Team in January 2011.

The Electronic Care Record Proof of Concept pre-qualification process scores of the four companies included in the Outline Business Case, the scoping and costs letter and the associated costs template have been placed in the Assembly library due to the size of the documents.

Disciplinary Action: DHSSPS Staff

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of staff disciplinary actions taken by his Department in each of the last two years, at Staff Officer level and above, including details of the offence and the disciplinary sanctions applied.

(AQW 9125/11-15)

Mr Poots: It has not been necessary for my Department to take formal disciplinary action under the NICS Disciplinary policy against any staff at Staff Officer level and above in the last two years.

Sex Offenders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many convicted sex offenders are disqualified from working with children and vulnerable adults under the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults (Northern Ireland) Order 2003.

(AQW 9139/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) assumed responsibility for barring decision-making from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) and the Department of Education in 2009 under the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (Northern Ireland) Order 2007. The ISA began making barring decisions in respect of referrals received from Northern Ireland organisations on 13 March 2009. From that same date, DHSSPS ceased making barring decisions under the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults (NI) Order (POCVA).

In the course of decision-making by DHSSPS under POCVA, a total of 158 individuals were added to either the Disqualification from Working with Children's List and/or the Disqualification from Working with Vulnerable Adults List. Referrals were made under POCVA on the basis of misconduct which harmed a child or vulnerable adult or placed them at risk of harm; and, in the majority of cases, those referred had no criminal convictions for sexual offences or otherwise. DHSSPS cannot confirm the number of convicted sex offenders included on the POCVA disqualification lists on the basis that it does not hold that information.

NICE Technology Appraisals/Clinical Guidelines

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) which of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) Technology Appraisals and Clinical Guidelines have been implemented since the publication of Circular HSC (SQSD) 04/11 'New Process for Endorsement, Implementation, Monitoring and Assurance in Northern Ireland'; and (ii) the level of funding allocated for the NICE approved treatments and procedures.

(AQW 9157/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) The HSC Board has issued 23 Commissioning Statements since 28 September 2012 when the new guidance came into effect. These refer to guidance published by NICE prior to the new process being introduced. The reference numbers for the endorsed NICE guidance are set out in the table below.

Technology Appraisal guidance (TAs) for which the HSC Board has sent out a Commissioning Statement
TA 75, TA 166, TA 169, TA 187, TA 188, TA 190, TA 193, TA 195, TA 198, TA 200, TA 208, TA 215, TA 216, TA 221, TA 222, TA 223, TA 226, TA 227, TA 228, TA 229, TA 230, TA 232, TA 234

For guidance published by NICE from 28 September 2012 the Health and Social Care Board is required to submit to my Department a commissioning plan or Board response setting out its plans for implementation of endorsed NICE guidance. These plans or responses are expected within 15 weeks of the confirmed receipt of the endorsement and the first of these are expected shortly.

- (ii) Some £5million of additional funding was secured as part of October Monitoring for specialist medicines, some of which provided access to the treatments referred to in the Commissioning Statements listed above.

When developing commissioning plans and Board responses for the implementation of NICE guidance, the HSC Board must take into account available resources and competing HSC priorities.

Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland: Judicial Review

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, following the recent judicial review, what steps his Department will take in relation to community pharmacies.

(AQO 1475/11-15)

Mr Poots: Following the remedy hearing, on 7 February 2012, for the judicial review brought by Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland (CPNI) I subsequently met with their representatives on 14 February 2012 to discuss the way forward for community pharmacy. I am keen that we move forward in a way which will enable community pharmacy to deliver the new healthcare model envisaged in “Transforming Your Care”, which is sustainable for pharmacists, improves outcomes for patients and which delivers value for money.

Following the meeting I have tasked officials in my Department and the HSC Board to continue negotiations with CPNI on the way forward for community pharmacy and how the available funding could be invested now and for the future. Officials have subsequently met formally with CPNI on three occasions.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis Association: Funding

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the level of grant aid paid to the Northern Ireland Myalgic Encephalomyelitis Association in each of the last five years.

(AQW 9183/11-15)

Mr Poots: The funding provided to the ME Association by my Department in each of the last five years is set out in the table below.

Year	Amount of Funding
20011/12	£18,434
20010/11	£18,434
2009/10	£18,434
2008/09	£17,984
2007/08	£17,546

Nursing Homes: Alleged Abuse

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the alleged abuses in nursing homes found during the investigation carried out by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.

(AQW 9212/11-15)

Mr Poots: I welcome the NI Human Rights Commission's interest in this extremely important area. Making sure that vulnerable people's human rights are upheld, especially when they cannot do so for themselves, should always be at the forefront of our thinking and working practices as a civilised society.

I am satisfied that the vast majority of nursing homes and their staff are doing a high quality job in caring for their residents, and I commend the many staff who routinely give of their utmost to provide the best possible care. But I am very dismayed and concerned at the instances of poor practice chronicled in the report. Even if they are very much in the minority, as I believe they are, they are simply not acceptable. I should indicate that the evidence gathering and analysis of it would not have been carried out to the standards we would normally expect.

My Department will be examining the recommendations from the report in detail over the coming weeks, in consultation with RQIA and HSC and the independent sector as appropriate, and I will take any necessary action to ensure we achieve our aim of doing everything possible to protect the most vulnerable members of our society.

Prisoners: Regulation of Prescription Medicine

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline (i) the policy on prescription medicines for prisoners; and (ii) how prescription medicines are regulated when a prisoner is on a two-week course.

(AQW 9235/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) Medicines are prescribed in prisons on the basis of national guidance and the clinical judgement of the medical practitioner.
- (ii) All prisoners who are prescribed medication are subject to a comprehensive risk assessment to determine their suitability to be in possession of their own medication. The risk assessment takes into account the prisoner, the medication and their location. If they are considered suitable, they may receive their medication on a daily, weekly or monthly basis, depending on the drug. If they are not considered suitable to be in possession of their own medication, it will be issued to them dose by dose by a nurse.

Winter Fuel Allowance: Cancer Patients

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what provision is in place for cancer patients to claim the winter fuel allowance when a GP has neither provided a consent form nor sent the relevant information to his Department.

(AQW 9286/11-15)

Mr Poots: I can advise that all General Practitioner (GP) Practices have been asked to examine their records and identify patients with a diagnosis of cancer who meet the eligibility criteria set by my Department for payment.

Patients who consider they should receive payment, but have not yet received a consent form from their GP, should, in the first instance, contact their GP.

Dental Services: Tyrone County Hospital, Omagh

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) why the paediatric dental service has been removed from the Tyrone County Hospital, Omagh; and (ii) whether an inquiry was held prior to the decision being made; and if so, to detail the findings.

(AQW 9325/11-15)

Mr Poots: The provision of services are operational matters for Health and Social Services Trust. The Western Health and Social Care Trust has advised that for reasons of patient safety daycase paediatric surgery will take place at Tyrone County Hospital only in instances where there is a second anaesthetist on site.

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the estimated annual cost to the Health Service of treating post-traumatic stress disorder.

(AQO 1467/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is not possible to quantify separately the resources provided by Health and Social Care Services for the treatment of post traumatic stress disorder. However, in the year 2010/11 year £228 million was spent on specialist services for people with mental health problems. This does not include expenditure on primary care services and voluntary organisations which may treat and support patients with post traumatic stress disorder.

Arthritis

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what research is being carried out in relation to arthritis.

(AQO 1468/11-15)

Mr Poots: Currently there are nine clinical research projects underway to benefit people with arthritis involving four of the five HSC Trusts in association with university-based researchers. The projects are investigating a variety of approaches to diagnosis and care including:

- clinical trials of novel drugs;
- tests to determine whether a person's gene profile can predict their response to a certain drug;
- tests for biological molecules, known as biomarkers, that change to indicate whether or not a person is responding to treatment; and
- studies on the application of MRI and of ultrasound.

Audiology Services

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action is being taken to ensure a high standard of provision of audiology services.[R]

(AQO 1469/11-15)

Mr Poots: Audiology services are an essential component of the range of care provided to people with a hearing impairment, and we in Northern Ireland are fortunate to have well trained, committed, and dedicated audiology professionals delivering these services.

However, as our population gets older, and advances are made in digital hearing aid technology, the demand for audiology services will undoubtedly increase. Faced with these challenges, I have decided to follow the example of our colleagues in Great Britain and begin to develop quality standards for audiology services here, to ensure that the service we provide in the future will continue to be of the highest quality possible, and focused on the needs of the patient.

As a fundamental first step in this process, my Department has asked the Health and Social Care Board to instigate a scoping study, which will look at where we are now in terms of audiology quality standards and make recommendations about where we want to be. They have agreed to report by the end of June 2012.

Stereotactic Ablative Radiotherapy

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that Stereotactic Ablative Radiotherapy can deliver lifesaving treatment to cancer patients, what action his Department is taking to make this treatment more widely available to patients.

(AQO 1470/11-15)

Mr Poots: Stereotactic ablative radiotherapy is a specialist service that is not currently provided in Northern Ireland. The relatively small population of Northern Ireland may not be sufficient to safely

maintain the highly specialised skills required to provide this service locally. Any consideration of local provision would need to take account of factors such as best practice guidance with reference to issues such as number of patients and operators needed to support and sustain a robust model of service for our population.

However stereotactic radiotherapy is available in other parts of the UK mainland and patients from Northern Ireland can be referred by their consultants through the HSC Board Extra Contractual Referrals (ECRs) process. Tertiary referrals are provided in Leeds Teaching Hospital, Sheffield Teaching Hospital and the National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery, London.

The decision to recommend a patient for stereotactic radiotherapy is, in the first instance, a matter for the clinical judgement of the referring consultant. This is based on the patient's clinical condition, the best available evidence on the most appropriate treatment and discussions with the patient on his or her treatment options.

Currently there are no plans to introduce this treatment in Northern Ireland.

Mater Hospital, Belfast: Expansion

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department has any plans to expand services at the Mater Hospital, Belfast.

(AQO 1471/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Mater Hospital continues to provide an excellent range of services to the people of North Belfast and beyond. The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, in its document "Excellence and Choice - A consultation on the proposals to reorganise the delivery of acute services in Belfast" has set out its initial plans for the provision of some acute services across all the Belfast Hospitals.

Work on these plans is ongoing and several changes have already been successfully implemented to deliver the best possible care to patients. "Transforming Your Care" The Review of Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland, will also have a bearing on the future configuration of services in Belfast.

However, I look forward to the Mater Hospital having a continued role in the provision of safe resilient and sustainable services in the future.

South Tyrone Hospital, Dungannon: Service Provision

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has for the South Tyrone Hospital, Dungannon.

(AQO 1472/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have no plans to change the current service provision at the South Tyrone Hospital. On 24 February 2012, the Southern Health and Social Care Trust concluded its consultation on the future service model for minor injury services across the Trust area, including South Tyrone.

Any proposed changes to the configuration of services arising out of this consultation will be considered within the context of providing safe and sustainable health and social care services.

Dental Services: Practice Allowance

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the impact on the delivery of high quality patient treatment, resulting from the loss of the seven percent Practice Allowance for dentists in deprived areas.

(AQO 1473/11-15)

Mr Poots: The practice allowance was introduced in 2005 to provide Health Service committed practices with financial support for the increasing requirements on practitioners. Practices who meet the eligibility criteria set out in the Statement of Dental Remuneration, or can demonstrate that they

are sufficiently committed to the Health Service, are still able to receive the higher rate of practice allowance, which is 11% as against 4% for all other dentists.

As this change, which was fully implemented in April 2011, should not affect Health Service committed practices, there should not be any impact on the ability of Health Service committed practices to continue delivering high quality treatment and care to patients in deprived areas or elsewhere.

Business Services Transformation Programme

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the impact that the commencement of the recruitment programme by the Business Services Organisation might have on the validity of the consultation on the Business Services Transformation Programme. **(AQO 1474/11-15)**

Mr Poots: The recruitment programme would have had no such impact. It was concerned with the BSO's existing operations, and was entirely unrelated to the Business Services Transformation Programme and to the shared service proposals on which the public consultation closed last Wednesday.

Department of Justice

Prison Service Staff: Disciplinary Actions or Investigations

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) how many disciplinary actions against, or investigations of, Prison Service staff are on-going; (ii) on what date did each case begin; (iii) at what stage is each case; and (iv) of those staff currently under investigation, how many are suspended on full pay. **(AQW 8438/11-15)**

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): There are currently 17 disciplinary actions on-going against Prison Service Staff and 8 members of staff currently under investigation. The table below provides the information requested.

(i) Number	(ii) Date Case Began	(iii) Current Stage
1	01.10.2009	Appeal
2	02.10.2009	Appeal
3	08.04.2010	Case on hold pending outcome of dignity at work complaint.
4	03.11.2010	Hearing
5	01.09.2011	Appeal
6	02.09.2011	Appeal
7	01.11.2011	Hearing
8	22.11.2011	Hearing
9	22.11.2011	Hearing
10	22.11.2011	Hearing
11	09.01.2012	Appeal
12	02.02.2012	Hearing
13	06.02.2012	Hearing
14	09.12.2012	Hearing

(i) Number	(ii) Date Case Began	(iii) Current Stage
15	14.02.2012	Hearing
16	14.02.2012	Hearing
17	14.02.2012	Hearing

(iv) There are eight Prison Service staff currently under investigation, all have been suspended on full pay. The table below provides the information requested.

Number	Suspension
1	28.03.2011
2	15.12.2011
3	16.12.2011
4	04.01.2012
5	04.01.2012
6	04.01.2012
7	23.01.2012
8	23.01.2012

Prisons: Searching Practices

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, given his intention to visit Portlaoise Prison to investigate searching practices, whether he will change existing legislation, or introduce new legislation, to exempt Northern Ireland from that which is relevant to all UK prisons, should he decide to engage a similar search mechanism to that used in Portlaoise.

(AQW 8440/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Prisons Act (Northern Ireland) 1953 gives authority to make rules for the management of prisons in Northern Ireland. Prison Rules in England & Wales, while similar in many respects to the Prison Rules in Northern Ireland, are made under separate legislation (Prisons Act 1952).

I will keep the rules regarding searching under review as NIPS continues to explore alternative technologies for searching.

Marian Price: Accommodation at Hydebank Wood

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Justice to outline the accommodation arrangements for Marian Price in Hydebank Wood Prison.

(AQW 8499/11-15)

Mr Ford: Marian McGlinchey (nee Price) is located in a self-contained unit within the Healthcare complex at Hydebank Wood Prison.

Her cell accommodation is augmented by separate recreational and kitchen facilities, all of which already existed on site, and are consistent with the facilities available to some existing female prisoners in Ash House. Work is in hand to create an appropriate environment and daily regime for Ms McGlinchey within the Healthcare Centre, including extended visiting sessions and access to a prisoner payphone.

Subject to risk assessment Ms McGlinchey also has the opportunity to undertake work, education or general association in the company of other female prisoners.

Marion Price: Accommodation at Hydebank Wood

Lord Morrow asked Minister of Justice whether Marion Price has relinquished her separated prisoner status to be accommodated in Hydebank Women's Prison; and if not, what alterations will have to be made, and what will they cost.

(AQW 8561/11-15)

Mr Ford: Marian McGlinchey (nee Price) has not relinquished her separated prisoner status on transfer to Hydebank Wood Prison.

Alterations have been made to Mrs McGlinchey's accommodation. These include; the installation of new doors and partitions; the fitting of an extractor fan; and the provision and movement of electrical sockets. The cost to date of meeting these at Hydebank Wood is £3533.11.

HMP Maghaberry: Unannounced Visits

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, given that the Pearson Review Team Report in 2009 raised concerns that 'the overriding emphasis on security and the physical arrangements to ensure security at Maghaberry make unannounced visits impossible' and that 'any malpractice may be suspended for the duration of a visit', how unannounced visits are being dealt with at HMP Magherberry Healthcare Centre.

(AQW 8563/11-15)

Mr Ford: Prison Governors and managers regularly visit all areas of the prison unannounced. These visits occur during the day and night, and include the Healthcare Centre.

Postage and Printing Costs

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Justice whether his Department, and its arm's-length bodies, give elected representatives the choice of receiving reports and all other correspondence by email to minimise postage and printing costs.

(AQW 8567/11-15)

Mr Ford: With regard to reports the Department of Justice follows the guidance published by OFMDFM entitled, 'Guidance on Distribution of Departmental Publications and Consultation Documents.'

With regard to all other correspondence the Department will usually reply in the method which was used by the applicants.

Strabane Courthouse: Recommended Works

Ms Boyle asked Minister of Justice for a breakdown of the £396,000 in works and costs that would be required to ensure that Strabane Courthouse is fit for purpose.

(AQW 8574/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below provides a breakdown of the estimated cost of the recommended works to Strabane Courthouse based on Condition Surveys carried out in 2005. New Condition Surveys are being carried out. Final costs for undertaking any works would depend on a number of factors, including the final specification and security requirements.

Recommended Works at Strabane Courthouse		
	Description of Improvements	Estimated Cost
External		
Roof	Specialist Survey	
External Walls & Car park	Redecorate railings & fencing Monitor render for repairs	
Windows/Doors	Redecorate and specialist clean	
Rainwater Drainage	Redecorate and clean	
Sub Total		£13,000
Internal		
Entrance Foyer/Reception	Alter lobby Lift Archway Metal Detector/mag locks Signs generally	
Public Circulation Areas	Minor works	
Public Utility Areas	Toilet flooring, minor work to ceilings	
Judges'/Magistrates' Chambers	Minor work to efflorescence	
Court Executive Offices	Replace all ceiling tiles	
Redecoration	Whole building	
Security Accommodation/Cells	Clad seating with stainless steel	
Sub Total		£94,000
Mechanical Services		
Heating	Replace plant Decorate tank Bund replacement Overhaul radiators	
Ventilation	Review Courtroom 1 system	
Domestic Water Services	Minor works	
Sub Total		£38,500
Electrical Services		
External Lighting	Minor replacements	
Emergency Lighting	New batteries	
Fire Alarms	Alarm to Sangar Upgrade system	
Ancillary Equipment	Replace junction boxes Upgrade system	
Sub Total		£21,000
Fire, Health and Safety		

Recommended Works at Strabane Courthouse		
	Description of Improvements	Estimated Cost
Fire	Signage	
Violence & aggression	Dock screens	
Stairs	Minor adaptations	
Fire Alarm system	General upgrade	
Roof areas	Access ladder	
Sub Total			£17,000
Security		
Various		
Sub Total		£23,500
Universal Access		
External	Road signs	
Means of Access	Minor alterations	
Access within courthouse	Lift installation	
	Change ironmongery	
	Widen strategic doors	
Use of Building	Relocate consultation rooms	
	Alterations to counter	
Courtroom Seating/ Witness Stand	Major refurbishment Remove step at bench, Courtroom 2	
Sub Total		£157,000
Estimated Professional Fees on above work		£32,000
Total		£396,000

The table below provides a breakdown of the estimated cost of the recommended works to Strabane Courthouse based on Disability Discrimination Act Surveys carried out in 2010. Final costs for undertaking any works would depend on a number of details, including the final specification.

Recommended works	
Improve access to the building	
New signage to disabled parking bay.	
Tactile paving to steps leading to courtroom.	£700
Access into the building	
New compliant doorsets into main entrance door, Court 1 and Court 2.	£8,000

Recommended works	
Access within the building – Horizontal Circulation Remodel openings and corridor widths to cell area. Remodel openings to provide compliant doors. Remodel entrance and landing to main court on first floor. Remodel entrance foyer lobby to first floor court.	£19,140
Access within the building – Vertical Circulation Provide extended handrails to staircases. Provide disabled refuge intercom.	£1,950
Toilet facilities Upgrade existing disabled toilets on ground floor. Upgrade existing public male and female toilet. Upgrade existing holding area toilet.	£1,500
Visitor reception Provide compliant public counter including fold down seating. Provision and a low level call point. Provide dimmable lighting to public office counter.	£4,100
Courtrooms Provide wheelchair spaces to public gallery and solicitor area in courtroom 2. Provide a new suitably sized witness box. Court 2 – induction loop/IR system to be reinstated.	£8,200
Visitor signage Provide suitable signage to BS 8300 standard.	£2,000
General Provide flashing beacons (except to courtrooms and induction loop systems throughout the building).	£1,950
Total	£47,540

Strabane Courthouse: DDA Compliance

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Justice for a breakdown of the £47,500 expenditure that would be required to ensure that Strabane Courthouse is fit for purpose in compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act.

(AQW 8575/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below provides a breakdown of the estimated cost of the recommended works to Strabane Courthouse based on Condition Surveys carried out in 2005. New Condition Surveys are being carried out. Final costs for undertaking any works would depend on a number of factors, including the final specification and security requirements.

Recommended Works at Strabane Courthouse		
	Description of Improvements	Estimated Cost
External		
Roof	Specialist Survey	
External Walls & Car park	Redecorate railings & fencing Monitor render for repairs	
Windows/Doors	Redecorate and specialist clean	
Rainwater Drainage	Redecorate and clean	
Sub Total		£13,000
Internal		
Entrance Foyer/Reception	Alter lobby Lift Archway Metal Detector/mag locks Signs generally	
Public Circulation Areas	Minor works	
Public Utility Areas	Toilet flooring, minor work to ceilings	
Judges'/Magistrates' Chambers	Minor work to efflorescence	
Court Executive Offices	Replace all ceiling tiles	
Redecoration	Whole building	
Security Accommodation/Cells	Clad seating with stainless steel	
Sub Total		£94,000
Mechanical Services		
Heating	Replace plant Decorate tank Bund replacement Overhaul radiators	
Ventilation	Review Courtroom 1 system	
Domestic Water Services	Minor works	
Sub Total		£38,500
Electrical Services		
External Lighting	Minor replacements	
Emergency Lighting	New batteries	
Fire Alarms	Alarm to Sangar Upgrade system	
Ancillary Equipment	Replace junction boxes Upgrade system	

Recommended Works at Strabane Courthouse		
	Description of Improvements	Estimated Cost
Sub Total		£21,000
Fire, Health and Safety		
Fire	Signage	
Violence & aggression	Dock screens	
Stairs	Minor adaptations	
Fire Alarm system	General upgrade	
Roof areas	Access ladder	
Sub Total		£17,000
Security		
Various		
Sub Total		£23,500
Universal Access		
External	Road signs	
Means of Access	Minor alterations	
Access within courthouse	Lift installation	
	Change ironmongery	
	Widen strategic doors	
Use of Building	Relocate consultation rooms	
	Alterations to counter	
Courtroom Seating/ Witness Stand	Major refurbishment Remove step at bench, Courtroom 2	
Sub Total		£157,000
Estimated Professional Fees on above work		£32,000
Total		£396,000

The table below provides a breakdown of the estimated cost of the recommended works to Strabane Courthouse based on Disability Discrimination Act Surveys carried out in 2010. Final costs for undertaking any works would depend on a number of details, including the final specification.

Recommended works	
Improve access to the building New signage to disabled parking bay. Tactile paving to steps leading to courtroom.	£700
Access into the building New compliant doorsets into main entrance door, Court 1 and Court 2.	£8,000

Recommended works	
Access within the building – Horizontal Circulation Remodel openings and corridor widths to cell area. Remodel openings to provide compliant doors. Remodel entrance and landing to main court on first floor. Remodel entrance foyer lobby to first floor court.	£19,140
Access within the building – Vertical Circulation Provide extended handrails to staircases. Provide disabled refuge intercom.	£1,950
Toilet facilities Upgrade existing disabled toilets on ground floor. Upgrade existing public male and female toilet. Upgrade existing holding area toilet.	£1,500
Visitor reception Provide compliant public counter including fold down seating. Provision and a low level call point. Provide dimmable lighting to public office counter.	£4,100
Courtrooms Provide wheelchair spaces to public gallery and solicitor area in courtroom 2. Provide a new suitably sized witness box. Court 2 – induction loop/IR system to be reinstated.	£8,200
Visitor signage Provide suitable signage to BS 8300 standard.	£2,000
General Provide flashing beacons (except to courtrooms and induction loop systems throughout the building).	£1,950
Total	£47,540

Police and Community Safety Partnerships: Independent Membership

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how many applications for independent membership of Police and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSP) have been received for each PCSP area.

(AQW 8593/11-15)

Mr Ford: The process of appointing independent members to Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) is a restricted function of the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

However, the Board updated the PCSP Joint Committee (consisting of representatives from my Department and the Board) of the number of applications received in each area, which are as follows:

PCSP/ DPCSP	Applications Received	Belfast breakdown
Antrim	24	
Ards	30	

PCSP/ DPCSP	Applications Received	Belfast breakdown
Armagh	18	
Ballymena	29	
Ballymoney	16	
Banbridge	30	
Belfast	83*	45
Belfast – North DPCSP		20
Belfast – South DPCSP		20
Belfast – East DPCSP		22
Belfast – West DPCSP		32
Carrickfergus	17	
Castlereagh	13	
Coleraine	13	
Cookstown	13	
Craigavon	23	
Derry	24	
Down	21	
Dungannon & South Tyrone	15	
Fermanagh	21	
Larne	17	
Limavady	14	
Lisburn	33	
Magherafelt	16	
Moyle	12	
Newry and Mourne	29	
Newtownabbey	35	
North Down	18	
Omagh	10	
Strabane	11	
Total	585	

* Applicants for Belfast can apply for membership of the city's PCSP and one or more District Policing and Community Safety Partnership (DPCSP). Members of DPCSPs may also be members of the Belfast PCSP

Prison Service: Artefacts

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice what steps are being taken (i) to maintain the integrity of the collection of artefacts relating to the history of the Prison Service in Ireland, which are held at Woburn House, Millisle; and (ii) to record the items which are loaned to other sites or exhibitions.

(AQW 8609/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) The collection of artefacts stored at Millisle remain the property of the Northern Ireland Prison Service. There are currently no plans to remove or dispose of the artefacts from Millisle.
- (ii) Over the past 6 years NIPS employed an ex officer to catalogue the artefacts, including those items on loan to the former prison at Crumlin Road. An inventory of any items loaned out from Millisle is retained on site.

In addition to the artefacts already loaned to OFMdFM for use at the former prison site on Crumlin Road, NIPS has also been asked to consider the loan of artefacts to the Maze/Long Kesh Programme Delivery Unit, who are considering a future display to include Prison Service artefacts at the new Peace and Reconciliation Centre which is planned for the Maze site, subject to receiving European funding. No decision has yet been taken on this request, but in the event that any items are loaned an agreement will be drawn up and an inventory will be completed.

Prison Service: Artefacts

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice what assurances he can give that the collection of artefacts relating to the history of the Prison Service in Ireland, which are held at the Prison Service College, will remain intact until a decision has been taken on a Northern Ireland Prison Service museum.

(AQW 8611/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) The collection of artefacts stored at Millisle remain the property of the Northern Ireland Prison Service. There are currently no plans to remove or dispose of the artefacts from Millisle.
- (iii) Over the past 6 years NIPS employed an ex officer to catalogue the artefacts, including those items on loan to the former prison at Crumlin Road. An inventory of any items loaned out from Millisle is retained on site.

In addition to the artefacts already loaned to OFMdFM for use at the former prison site on Crumlin Road, NIPS has also been asked to consider the loan of artefacts to the Maze/Long Kesh Programme Delivery Unit, who are considering a future display to include Prison Service artefacts at the new Peace and Reconciliation Centre which is planned for the Maze site, subject to receiving European funding. No decision has yet been taken on this request, but in the event that any items are loaned an agreement will be drawn up and an inventory will be completed.

Prisoners: Literacy and Numeracy

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Justice (i) to detail the level of illiteracy and innumeracy among prisoners over the last three years; (ii) what affirmative actions have been taken to address these issues; and (iii) with which organisations or bodies have these actions been undertaken.

(AQW 8633/11-15)

Mr Ford: Tables A and B below set out the levels of literacy and numeracy among prisoners assessed on committal over the last three years, 2009-2011.

I refer to my reply to your previous AQW 4809/11 (March 2011).

The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) is engaged with the Department for Employment & Learning, including Belfast Metropolitan College, the North West Regional College, and the Prison Arts Foundation in providing support to prisoners.

TABLE A – LITERACY

Year	Establishment	Below Entry Level	EL1 = 5 year old	EL2 = 7 year old	EL3 = 9 year old	Level 1 = 14 year old and higher
2009	Maghaberry	6%	4%	14%	38%	38%
	Magilligan	4%	6%	11%	26%	53%
	Hydebank	8%	4%	16%	51%	21%
	Ash House	13%	3%	2%	55%	27%
2010	Maghaberry	4%	2%	13%	44%	37%
	Magilligan	4%	2%	10%	25%	59%
	Hydebank	3%	2%	16%	19%	60%
	Ash House	2%	4%	18%	13%	63%
2011	Maghaberry	6%	5%	16%	43%	30%
	Magilligan	5%	1%	9%	33%	52%
	Hydebank	2%	2%	13%	18%	65%
	Ash House	1%	2%	18%	18%	61%

TABLE B – NUMERACY

Year	Establishment	Below Entry Level	EL1 = 5 year old	EL2 = 7 year old	EL3 = 9 year old	Level 1 = 14 year old and higher
2009	Maghaberry	7%	6%	17%	38%	32%
	Magilligan	4%	3%	12%	43%	38%
	Hydebank	7%	5%	20%	44%	24%
	Ash House	13%	2%	16%	56%	13%
2010	Maghaberry	4%	2%	3%	46%	45%
	Magilligan	4%	2%	7%	42%	45%
	Hydebank	3%	2%	3%	46%	46%
	Ash House	7%	-	7%	47%	39%
2011	Maghaberry	12%	7%	21%	41%	19%
	Magilligan	2%	1%	4%	53%	40%
	Hydebank	2%	2%	3%	44%	49%
	Ash House	2%	2%	8%	42%	46%

Sex Offender Treatment Programme: Relapses

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 7466/11-15, to detail the length of time between release from custody and the commission of a further similar offence, for each of the seven people who had not participated in a Sex Offenders Treatment Programme.

(AQW 8656/11-15)

Mr Ford: The following table details the length of time between release from custody and the commission of a further similar offence, for each of the seven people who had not participated in a Sex Offenders Treatment Programme.

Number:	Time period lapsed from release to date of reoffending:
1	9 months and 20 days
2	4 months and 17 days
3	1 month and 14 days
4	2 years, 11 months and 3 days
5	5 months and 21 days

In the remaining two cases the further charges relate to offences committed prior to the original sentence.

Prison Service Staff: Driving Without Insurance

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 7685/11-15 and AQW 7767/11-15, why Prison Service staff were not reported to the PSNI or the Public Prosecution Service for aiding and abetting the commission of an offence, or any other relevant charge; and whether he will order an investigation into the handling of this matter.

(AQW 8663/11-15)

Mr Ford: Following the completion of an investigation into the Prisoner Assessment Unit, the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) did not consider that a criminal offence had been committed.

The two officers were subsequently charged and disciplined under the NIPS Code of Conduct and Discipline.

Small Claims Court: Advice

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice whether the Courts and Tribunals Service has a standard procedure for advising members of the public who wish to appeal a Small Claims Court decision without employing a solicitor.

(AQW 8671/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service booklet "Small Claims Guide" explains how to lodge an appeal against a Small Claims Court order. The guide also informs customers that court staff are unable to provide legal advice and recommends they contact a solicitor or the Citizens Advice Bureau if legal advice is required.

The Department of Justice has no power to instigate an appeal of a Small Claims Court decision to which it is not a party. Where the Department is a party it has the same rights of appeal as all other litigants.

Small Claims Court: Appeals

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice whether his Department has the power to instigate an appeal of a Small Claims Court decision.

(AQW 8672/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service booklet “Small Claims Guide” explains how to lodge an appeal against a Small Claims Court order. The guide also informs customers that court staff are unable to provide legal advice and recommends they contact a solicitor or the Citizens Advice Bureau if legal advice is required.

The Department of Justice has no power to instigate an appeal of a Small Claims Court decision to which it is not a party. Where the Department is a party it has the same rights of appeal as all other litigants.

Judicial Review: Legal Costs

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice who has the authority to set the conditions under which legal fees are paid for by the losing party in a judicial review.

(AQW 8713/11-15)

Mr Ford: The award of legal costs and outlays in a judicial review is a matter for the discretion of the court. The normal principle will be that ‘costs follow the event’: that is the party winning the review will be entitled to costs, but will generally be unable to recover these if the ‘losing party’ is in receipt of legal aid.

Where the parties do not agree the amounts payable, the court may order that the legal fees are assessed by the costs judge (known as the Taxing Master). In any particular case the costs associated with the use of lawyers from outside the jurisdiction will be determined according to the circumstances and the applicable legal principles.

The court’s decision in respect of the award of costs to or against any party, and the decisions as to what costs are to be allowed, are both matters of judicial discretion which are subject to review and appeal by the appellate courts.

Judicial Review: Legal Costs

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice why the losing party in a judicial review does not have to pay the costs of lawyers from outside Northern Ireland, regardless of their expertise.

(AQW 8714/11-15)

Mr Ford: The award of legal costs and outlays in a judicial review is a matter for the discretion of the court. The normal principle will be that ‘costs follow the event’: that is the party winning the review will be entitled to costs, but will generally be unable to recover these if the ‘losing party’ is in receipt of legal aid.

Where the parties do not agree the amounts payable, the court may order that the legal fees are assessed by the costs judge (known as the Taxing Master). In any particular case the costs associated with the use of lawyers from outside the jurisdiction will be determined according to the circumstances and the applicable legal principles.

The court’s decision in respect of the award of costs to or against any party, and the decisions as to what costs are to be allowed, are both matters of judicial discretion which are subject to review and appeal by the appellate courts.

Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the viability of prosecutions under the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005 and the sustainability of heavily discounted sentences for accomplice witnesses who turn out to be unreliable.

(AQW 8724/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Director of Public Prosecutions has responsibility for the viability of prosecutions taken under specific legislation. The convention of providing reduced sentences existed in common law before the enactment of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005 (SOCPA), introduced a statutory framework for the use of assisting offenders which includes a provision for the court to substitute a

greater sentence if the assisting offender fails to give their agreed evidence. A reduction in sentence is not mandatory under SOCPA.

Prison Service: Pearson Review

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the concerns raised in the Pearson Review Team Report, what action has been taken in relation to (i) the duration of disciplinary investigations into alleged misbehaviour by staff; and (ii) the difficulties of convincing a neutral observer that fairness and transparency exists.

(AQW 8725/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Prison Service is currently setting up a Professional Standards Unit which will be responsible for ensuring disciplinary investigations are conducted within set timeframes. The unit will improve perceptions of fairness and transparency by overseeing investigations centrally, setting standards, and holding comparative data on cases.

Courthouse Closures: Impact on Travel Costs

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 7952/11-15, given that the majority of defendants appearing at magistrates courts are from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and that those on JobSeekers Allowance receive £57 per week, how they are expected to travel further distances to attend court, particularly in the Magherafelt and Strabane areas which are predominantly rural areas with a poor public transport network.

(AQW 8726/11-15)

Mr Ford: Defendants attending court hearings are responsible for their own travel arrangements. Data on the socio-economic background of defendants appearing at Magistrates' Courts is not collected, however, information collected through Exit Surveys in 2011 indicated that on the day of the survey, 84% of court users attending Magherafelt Courthouse used private transport while 1% used public transport. 76% of court users attending Strabane Courthouse used private transport to get to court and 3% used public transport. The availability of public transport and associated cost has been considered and will inform the analysis of consultee responses.

Ronnie Graham: Release from Custody

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the convicted child murderer, Ronnie Graham, (i) who authorised his partial release back into the community; (ii) who decided that it was suitable for him to reside at Thompson House, Belfast, which is surrounded by schools, and Centenary House, Belfast; and (iii) what assessments were carried out to determine the safety of the public, particularly children, during the periods of temporary release.

(AQW 8728/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information requested constitutes sensitive personal data as defined at section 2 of the Data Protection Act 1998. The disclosure of such information is likely to breach the data subject's rights under the Act and would be incompatible with the Data Protection Principles. The information cannot therefore be provided as requested.

Sexual Abuse: Members of the Clergy

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many people, in their capacity as a member of the clergy or a religious body, have been convicted of sexual abuse in each of the last ten years to date.

(AQW 8729/11-15)

Mr Ford: Court conviction datasets do not contain such information.

Prison Service: Board Members

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Justice, for each of the last five years, to detail (i) the names of the Board Members of the NI Prison Service Trust; (ii) each individual's attendance records at Board meetings, including the percentage of time they attended each meeting; (iii) how Board members are recruited; and (iv) what written records exist of approval of the appointment processes from the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

(AQW 8745/11-15)

Mr Ford:

(i) The names of Directors within the past 5 years are as follows:

Name	
Mr F Spratt	2006/7-present
Mr C McGrugan	2006/7-present
Mrs J Robinson MBE	2006/7- present
Mrs M Kerr	2006/7- present
Mr N Lowe	2006/7-present
Mr D Gowdy	2006/7-present
Mr J McCready	2006/7-present
Mr E Fair	2006/7-present
Rt Hon J Donaldson MP	2007/8-present
Mr S Gaynor	2010/11-present
Miss A McGarvey	2011/12-present
Ms A Lo MLA	2010/11
Mr J Steele CB OBE TD DL FRSA	2006/7-2010/11
Lady Hermon	2010/11
Lady Bloomfield	2006/7-2009/10
Mr B Rea MBE	2006/7-2008/9
Miss M Hempton	2006/7-2008/9
Lord Maginnis	2006/7-2009/10
Mr A Maginness MLA	2006/7-2009/10
Mrs S Peake	2006/7
Mr D Clayton	2006/7-2008/9
Mr N Mitchell	2006/7-2007/8

- (ii) Attendance records are not easily accessible and the percentage of time is not available.
- (iii) Board members are appointed according to the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Prison Service Trust.
- (iv) The Prison Service Trust is incorporated under the Companies (NI) Order 1986 as a company limited by guarantee in accordance with the Memorandum and Articles of Association, and is not regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments Northern Ireland (CPANI) and therefore not required to seek approval of its appointment process from the CPANI.

Prison Service: Trust Volunteers

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the NI Prison Service Trust (PST), to detail, since its establishment (i) whether the Trust has exceeded the statutory minimum number of carers accompanying clients on any trip that was at least partially funded by the public sector; (ii) the caring needs of those clients on each trip; and (iii) the qualifications of the accompanying PST staff to meet those needs in line with (a) statutory requirements; and (b) guidelines issued by arm's-length bodies, such as Disability Action.

(AQW 8746/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Prison Service Trust has provided the following answers:

- (i) There are a minimum of two volunteers per trip.
- (ii) Client's needs on each trip are variable.
- (iii) (a) & (b) Volunteers are sufficiently qualified to meet the needs of the clients on trips.

Prison Service: Trust Support

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Justice how many people (i) qualify for support from the NI Prison Service Trust; and (ii) are supported by the Trust.

(AQW 8747/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Prison Service Trust has provided the following answers:

- (i) 544 people qualify for support from the NI Prison Service Trust.
- (ii) Each client case is considered on its own merits by the Prison Service Trust Board of Directors.

Trade Union: Funding

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Justice to detail the level of funding his Department allocated to each trade union in the (i) 2000/01; (ii) 2005/06; and (iii) 2010/11 financial years.

(AQW 8764/11-15)

Mr Ford: As the Department of Justice was created in April 2010 figures can only be provided for the 2010/11 financial year.

The Department does not allocate funding to trade union organisations. However, it does pay the salary costs of employees who are released on full-time secondment to a recognised trade union.

In 2010/2011 DOJ released four employees to undertake trade union work at a total cost of £155,073.28.

HMP Maghaberry: Pearson Recommendations

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) how many of the 38 recommendations contained in the Pearson Review Team Report have been fully implemented; and (ii) whether the safer cells/observation cells in the Healthcare Centre at Maghaberry Prison have been completed, and when they will be functional.

(AQW 8797/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) 24 of the Pearson Review Team Report recommendations have been fully implemented. In addition, a further nine recommendations have been subsumed within the Strategic Efficiency and Effectiveness (SEE) Programme.
- (ii) The safer/observation cells in the Healthcare Centre at Maghaberry Prison were completed in May 2010.

Life Sentences (Northern Ireland) Order 2001

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many prisoners are currently serving sentences under the Life Sentences (NI) Order 2001.

(AQW 8798/11-15)

Mr Ford: As of 28 February 2012, 187 prisoners are currently serving sentences under the Life Sentences (NI) Order 2001.

Prisoners: Category A

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many Category A prisoners are classed as separated.
(AQW 8800/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are 45 Category A prisoners who are classed as separated.

Courthouse Closures: Financial Impact

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Justice what research has been carried out, or is planned to be carried out, on the financial impact of the proposed closure of courthouses on those who will be affected.

(AQW 8806/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Hearing Centre closure consultation exercise recognised that some court users, including legal representatives, may have to travel further to attend court. When developing these proposals my officials researched the distance between venues, travel time, and availability and cost of public transport. The potential financial impact of the proposed closures has been highlighted during the public meetings which formed part of the consultation exercise. All points raised during the consultation exercise will be fully considered.

Any increase in staff travel costs is expected to be minimal as the majority of Hearing Centre staff are already based at other courthouses.

Courthouse Closures: Impact on Travel Costs

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Justice what increase expenditure on travel for staff and legal representatives has been factored into the proposed closure of courthouses.

(AQW 8808/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Hearing Centre closure consultation exercise recognised that some court users, including legal representatives, may have to travel further to attend court. When developing these proposals my officials researched the distance between venues, travel time, and availability and cost of public transport. The potential financial impact of the proposed closures has been highlighted during the public meetings which formed part of the consultation exercise. All points raised during the consultation exercise will be fully considered.

Any increase in staff travel costs is expected to be minimal as the majority of Hearing Centre staff are already based at other courthouses.

Courthouse Closures: Impact on Legal Aid

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the impact of the proposed closure of courthouses on the number of claims for Legal Aid.

(AQW 8809/11-15)

Mr Ford: Legal aid is not granted on the basis of distance travelled to court and accordingly I do not anticipate any impact on the number of claims made for legal aid arising from the proposal to close hearing centres.

Drink Driving: Convictions

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of convictions for drink driving in each of the last five years, broken down by (i) constituency; and (ii) court division.

(AQW 8820/11-15)

Mr Ford: Drink driving offences span a number of statutes. The answer refers to offences under Article 15(1), Article 16(1)a, Article 16(1)b Article 17(6) and Article 18(7) of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. This includes convictions for offences that do not distinguish between driving under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol.

The tables below give the number convicted by constituency of residence of the offender and by court division for the calendar years 2004 to 2008 (the latest year for which figures are currently available).

NUMBER OF PEOPLE CONVICTED FOR DRINK OFFENCES BY CONSTITUENCY OF RESIDENCE OF THE OFFENDER 2004-2008

Constituency	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Belfast East	113	128	104	115	74
Belfast North	142	127	137	130	104
Belfast South	122	120	116	105	96
Belfast West	136	136	100	132	108
East Antrim	118	117	101	111	79
East Londonderry	131	125	129	154	98
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	112	112	171	172	162
Foyle	112	115	114	109	83
Lagan Valley	118	127	84	131	107
Mid Ulster	111	148	172	150	134
Newry and Armagh	176	179	184	207	198
North Antrim	131	124	121	188	108
North Down	125	119	134	126	121
South Antrim	129	121	100	170	120
South Down	142	138	120	169	128
Strangford	133	126	138	131	122
Upper Bann	112	160	140	174	134
West Tyrone	134	114	174	140	127
Unknown	141	200	250	522	469
Total	2,438	2,536	2,589	3,136	2,572

NUMBER OF PEOPLE CONVICTED FOR DRINK OFFENCES BY COURT DIVISION 2004-2008

Court Division	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Antrim	224	345	337	519	333
Ards	637	367	377	463	367

Court Division	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Armagh and South Down	218	327	329	428	370
Belfast	371	661	515	670	557
Craigavon and Lisburn	326	275	240	300	284
Fermanagh and Tyrone	296	341	535	478	435
Londonderry	366	220	256	278	226
Total	2,438	2,536	2,589	3,136	2,572

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

Data for 2004 to 2006 should not be directly compared with data from 2007 to 2008 as the data sets are sourced from different systems.

Disabled Car Parking Bays: Misuse

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how many people have been convicted of the misuse of disabled car parking bays in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8822/11-15)

Mr Ford: In November 2006 a new decriminalised system of parking enforcement involving penalty charge notices was introduced by the Department of Regional Development as the standard method of enforcement of parking contraventions including the misuse of parking spaces for people with disabilities. The powers are extensively used and statistics can be obtained from DRD.

As a result, there were only two convictions for “parking in a disabled person’s parking space” under Article 14(1) of the Road Traffic Regulation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 during the period in question.

Speeding up Justice Branch

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice (i) for his assessment of the work of the Speeding up Justice Branch, given that the length of time taken to deal with cases has increased, whilst the number of cases has fallen; (ii) for his assessment of the proposal to introduce statutory time limits for access to justice; and (iii) what measures he intends to put in place to ensure that the right to a fair trial is not prejudiced.

(AQW 8835/11-15)

Mr Ford: The causes of delay in the criminal justice system are varied and complex and driving out avoidable delay is the responsibility of a range of organisations within the criminal justice system. The role of the Speeding up Justice Branch is to support criminal justice agencies in identifying and understanding the causes of delay; co-ordinating the delivery of a multi-agency programme to speed up justice; developing policy and legislative proposals to assist the justice agencies in their efforts to improve organisational performance; and reporting to me, through the Criminal Justice Board, on progress. I am personally overseeing this collective effort to tackle delay and I can confirm that the Branch is actively pursuing the programme of work I have commissioned to speed up our justice system.

While I am disappointed that more has not been achieved, we must not lose sight of the fact that some progress is being made. As the recent Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland report into delay found, although performance in summons cases had deteriorated, performance in charge cases has continued to improve. The report also noted that the volume of Public Prosecution Service indictable cases and Crown Court listed cases had increased.

As I announced in the House on 6 February, statutory time limits will be introduced, initially in the Youth Court, within the lifetime of this Assembly. Statutory time limits will reinforce the programme of reform and ensure a strong focus right across the justice agencies on the timely delivery of justice.

The right to a fair trial is enshrined in Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Any measures within the programme of reform to speed up justice will be ECHR compliant.

Ronnie Graham: Psychiatric Assessment

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether Ronald Terence Graham is no longer deemed 'highly dangerous to society', as determined by a consultant psychiatrist and quoted in the Lord Chief Justice Kerr's ruling of March 2006.

(AQW 8843/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information requested constitutes sensitive personal data as defined at section 2 of the Data Protection Act 1998. The disclosure of such information is likely to breach the data subject's rights under the Act and would be incompatible with the Data Protection Principles. The information cannot therefore be provided as requested.

Prisoners: Category A

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many Category A prisoners are currently (i) remanded; and (ii) sentenced.

(AQW 8844/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are 81 Category A prisoners, (i) 33 are currently awaiting trial or on remand and (ii) 48 are sentenced.

Prison Governors: Suspension

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, given that two prison facility governors were suspended from duty and disciplined for discharging a prisoner's drug debt, and were found to have contributed to the reputational damage of the Prison Service, why their conduct was not reported to the Chief Inspector of Prisons or to the Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice.

(AQW 8845/11-15)

Mr Ford: The suspension and discipline of both Governors was dealt with under the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) Code of Conduct and Discipline. There is no requirement to report internal disciplinary issues to the Chief Inspector of Prisons or the Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice.

Trade Union: Secondment

Mr McCallister asked Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of (a) full-time; and (b) part-time staff who are currently on secondment from his Department, or its arm's length bodies, to each recognised trade union; (ii) the salary scale for each secondee; and (iii) the length of each secondment to date.

(AQW 8853/11-15)

Mr Ford:

Number of staff on secondment to a recognised trade union	Salary scale	Length of secondment
4 full-time staff seconded from DOJ and its Agencies	£18,038- £22,180 £23,336- £26,086 £27,115- £30,520 £45,110 (single point)	All secondments ongoing from 12 April 2010

There are no part-time staff on secondment to a Trade Union.

Prison Service: Private Investigators

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 7354/11-15, whether Data Protection law was breached by passing personal information on Prison Service staff to private investigators; and whether any of the employees affected by this action have raised concerns about this process and the associated security implications.

(AQW 8868/11-15)

Mr Ford: No aspects of the Data Protection Act 1998 were breached by passing personal information to private investigators. The Prison Service is entitled to defend its legal interests and this is provided for in the provisions at Schedules 2 and 3 of the Act, which specify the conditions for lawful processing.

Two individuals have made complaints in regard to the employment of private investigators. The Prison Service has responded to both complaints and it would not be appropriate to discuss the details at this stage.

Anti-social Behaviour Orders: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders that the (i) PSNI; (ii) local councils; and (iii) Housing Executive have applied for in the North Down area in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8880/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Anti-social Behaviour (Northern Ireland) Order 2004 provides for the making of an anti-social behaviour order against a person by a magistrates' court on application by a relevant authority, or by the court before which a person is convicted of a criminal offence.

The relevant authorities have advised that, in the North Down constituency, the PSNI applied for one ASBO in each of 2009 and 2011: both were issued.

Notes

All figures are based on operational information provided by the agencies and may be subject to change.

Anti-social Behaviour Orders: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how many Anti-social Behaviour Orders were issued in the North Down constituency in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8881/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Anti-social Behaviour (Northern Ireland) Order 2004 provides for the making of an anti-social behaviour order against a person by a magistrates' court on application by a relevant authority, or by the court before which a person is convicted of a criminal offence.

The relevant authorities have advised that, in the North Down constituency, the PSNI applied for one ASBO in each of 2009 and 2011: both were issued.

Notes

All figures are based on operational information provided by the agencies and may be subject to change.

Community Safety Strategy: Update

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the development of a new Community Safety Strategy.

(AQW 8896/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department has been engaging with key stakeholders to finalise the Community Safety Strategy. The draft Strategy will be considered by the Justice Committee on 22 March, and subject to Committee views, I intend to seek Executive approval by May and launch the Strategy soon thereafter.

Community Safety Strategy: Success

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Justice how the success of the Community Safety Strategy will be measured in terms of building safer, shared and confident communities with lower levels of crime and where people feel able to report incidents of crime.

(AQW 8897/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Community Safety Strategy will include a range of indicators to measure success, including police recorded crime and anti-social behaviour statistics, and findings on experiences and perceptions of crime from the Northern Ireland Crime Survey.

The Strategy will contribute directly to a number of commitments detailed in the draft Programme for Government, including those on tackling anti-social behaviour, seeking local agreement to reduce the number of peace-walls and tackling crime against older and vulnerable people.

Crimestoppers: Funding

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Justice how much funding his Department has provided to Crimestoppers in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8898/11-15)

Mr Ford: The funding paid to the Crimestoppers Trust since the Department of Justice was established is outlined in the table below.

Financial year	2010 - 2011	2011 - 2012 (to date)	Total
Amount Paid	£11,250	£15,000	£26,250

The Department of Justice provides funding to 26 Community Safety Partnerships who also provide financial support to the Crimestoppers Trust for the implementation and delivery of projects at a community level. Details are in Table below.

Financial year	2010 - 2011	2011 - 2012 (to date)	Total
Amount Paid	£5,857.50	£19,027	£25,164.50

Neighbourhood Watch Schemes: Funding

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Justice to list the Neighbourhood Watch schemes which operate in each council area; and how much funding his Department has provided to each scheme in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8899/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice came into being on the 12 April 2010; since that time my Department has contributed £25,000 per annum for the promotion and establishment of Neighbourhood Watch Schemes. My Department does not fund individual Neighbourhood Watch Schemes.

A list of Neighbourhood Watch Schemes which operate in each Council area is attached at Annex A.

Neighbourhood Watch Schemes ANNEX A

- Antrim
- Burnside Road, Dunadry
- Mainebank Neighbourhood Watch
- Neillsbrook Community Development Group

- The Beeches Crumlin Neighbourhood Watch
- Cairn Terrace Neighbourhood Watch
- Landgarve Manor Neighbourhood Watch
- Laurelvale Neighbourhood Watch
- Beechfield and Birchill Avenue Neighbourhood Watch
- Lakeview Neighbourhood Watch
- Steeple Green/Gardens Neighbourhood Watch
- Springfarm and District Community Association
- Parkley Neighbourhood Watch
- Glenoak Grange Neighbourhood Watch
- Pakenham Close Neighbourhod Watch
- Temple Rise Neighbourhood Watch
- Toome Neighbourhood Watch
- Aldergrove Neighbourhood Watch
- Cumbria Court Neighbourhood Watch
- Orchard Hill Neighbourhood Watch
- Cidercourt Road and Camlin Gardens Neighbourhood Watch
- Neillsbrook Fold Randalstown
- Ashdale Neighbourhood Watch
- Cairn Walk Bungalows Neighbourhood Watch
- Brantwood Gardens Lower Neighbourhood Watch
- Knightswood neighbourhood Watch

Total: 25

Ards

- Grange and Granary Community Watch
- Lisbane Neighbourhood Watch
- Glen Road West Neighbourhood Watch
- Glen Road East Neighbourhood Watch
- Breckenridge Neighbourhood Watch
- Millisle Road N W
- Laurelbank NW
- Ballynichol Neighbourhood Watch
- Knockeden Neighbourhood Watch
- East Street Neighbourhood Watch
- East End Residents Association
- Lusk Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Ardmore and Brae Neighbourhood Watch
- Bowtown Estate Neighbourhood Watch
- Abbot Link Neighbourhood Watch
- Meadow Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Scrabo Hill Neighbourhood Watch
- The Rookery Killinchy Neighbourhood Watch
- Whiterock Neighbourhood Watch
- Upper Circular Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Marcella Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Watermeade N W
- Barrhall/Ballyquinton Road N W
- Main St Kircubbin Neighbourhood Watch
- Cuttles Neighbourhood Watch
- Shore Road & Seaview Avenue N Watch
- Shore Road Square N Watch
- Masonic Beach N Watch

Total: 28

Armagh

- Tonnagh, Lisdown and Bracknagh NW
- Drumsallen and Dernasigh NW
- Tynan Neighbourhood Watch
- Loughgall Village & District Improvement Association
- Wayside Tandragee
- Loughgilly Neighbourhood Watch
- Sinton Park Tandragee Neighbourhood Watch
- Mourneview Park Tandragee Neighbourhood Watch
- Derryhale Neighbourhood Watch
- Richhill Neighbourhood Watch
- Mavemacullen Neighbourhood Watch
- Hillside Avenue Neighbourhood Watch
- Dinnahorra Neighbourhood Watch
- Messancy Place/Woodford Drive Neighbourhood Watch
- Ashgrove Markethill Neighbourhood Watch
- Breezemount, Hamiltonsbawn Neighbourhood Watch

- Enagh Markethill Neighbourhood Watch
- Sleepy Valley/Corcreevy Neighbourhood Watch
- Green Park Markethill N W
- Tannaghmore Neighbourhood Watch
- Hillside Park N W
- Thornhill Avenue Neighbourhood Watch
- Clonroot Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Glassdrummond Neighbourhood Watch
- Crossmore Gardens Neighbourhood Watch
- Lir Gardens Neighbourhood Watch
- Carbray Heights Keady Neighbourhood Watch
- Crossmore Green Neighbourhood Watch
- Crossmore Downs Neighbourhood Watch
- Seagahan Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Cardinal Dalton Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Drumcairn Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Lisbane Road neighbourhood Watch
- Tullyallen Neighbourhood Watch
- Ballyards Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Ballymacully Road neighbourhood Watch
- Blacks Lane Neighbourhood Watch
- Eden Drive Neighbourhood Watch
- Primate's manor Neighbourhood Watch
- Richview Heights Neighbourhood Watch
- Main Street/Greywood Close Neighbourhood Watch
- Dukes Lane neighbourhood Watch
- Lislasy Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Lisbofin Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Drumcullen Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Edenderry Drive Neighbourhood Watch
- Jenny's Row Neighbourhood Watch
- Ard Na Greine Neighbourhood Watch
- Coolmillish Way Neighbourhood watch
- Beech Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Woodford Heights Neighbourhood Watch
- Clay Road North Neighbourhood watch
- Clea Road South Neighbourhood watch
- Ashley Gardens Neighbourhood Watch
- Mullahead Neighbourhood Watch
- Carnagh South Neighbourhood Watch
- Carnagh North Neighbourhood Watch
- Woodlawn Heights Neighbourhood Watch
- Old Mill Neighbourhood Watch

Total: 59

Ballymena

- Carolhill Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Brooke Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Millfield Area Neighbourhood Watch
- Mull Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Skye Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Ballykeel 2 Neighbourhood Watch
- Waveney Mews Neighbourhood Watch
- Cullybackey Residents Association
- Kilmakevit Drive Neighbourhood Watch
- Tobar Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Station View Neighbourhood Watch

Total: 11

Ballymoney

- Church Meadow Neighbourhood Watch
- The Brambles Neighbourhood Watch

Total: 2

Banbridge

- Bannview Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Tonaghmore & District Rural Watch Group
- Rossc Connor Residents Association
- Cline Road Community Association
- Thornhill Community Association
- Rampart Street Neighbourhood Watch
- Lissize and Kiltariff Neighbourhood Watch
- Kinallen Rural Community Development Association
- Ballyroneigh Neighbourhood Watch

- Laganvale Neighbourhood Watch
- Residents of Rugby Avenue
- Bracken Valley and Ridge Neighbourhood Watch
- Bronte NWN Group
- Gransha Rural Community Development Association
- Willow Estate Neighbourhood Watch
- Castle Hill Neighbourhood Watch
- Brookfield Community Association
- The Spires Neighbourhood Watch
- Parkhill Neighbourhood Watch
- Villawood Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Magherabeg Rural Watch
- Beresford Green Neighbourhood Watch
- Ballygowan Road Dromore Neighbourhood Watch
- Milebush Manor Neighbourhood Watch
- Jubilee Heights Neighbourhood Watch
- Lower Drumgooland Neighbourhood Watch
- Cross Heights Neighbourhood Watch
- Dromara Rural Watch
- Hunters Hill Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Lough Road neighbourhood Watch
- Springfields Neighbourhood Watch
- Gowanvale Drive Neighbourhood Watch
- Windyridge Neighbourhood Watch

Total: 33

Belfast North

- Fortwilliam Parade Neighbourhood Watch
- Glandore Neighbourhood N W
- Waterloo Neighbourhood Watch
- Upper Cavehill Residents
- Somerton Close Neighbourhood Watch
- Gracehill/Oldpark Neighbourhood Watch
- Brown Square Community Association
- Ladbrooke Drive N W
- Duncairn Gardens Neighbourhood Watch
- Kinnaird Close Neighbourhood Watch
- Waterloo Gardens Neighbourhood Watch
- Beverlely /St Luke's/Cumberland Neighbourhood Watch
- BIH Housing Cliftonville Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Ashfield Gardens Neighbourhood Watch
- Henry St/North Queen St Neighbourhood Watch
- Glastonbury/Somerton N Watch
- Dunlambert Drive neighbourhood Watch
- Waterloo Neighbourhood Watch
- TDK Community Group

Total: 19

Belfast South

- Beechlands/Cherryhill NW Scheme Association
- Shamrock Place Neighbourhood Watch
- Old Coach Gardens
- Trossachs Area Residents Association
- Old Stranmillis Residents Association
- Fairway Drive N W
- Elgin Street Neighbourhood Watch
- Delhi Street Neighbourhood Watch
- Hampton Park Residents Association
- Old Coach Road Neighbourhood Watch
- St Ives Gardens Neighbourhood Watch
- Deramore Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Bladon Drive Deramore Residents' Association
- Deramore Park South Neighbourhood Watch
- Deramore Drive Neighbourhood Watch
- Wellington Square Neighbourhood Watch
- College Heights, Wellington Sq Neighbourhood Watch
- Lower Courtyard Neighbourhood Watch
- Raby Street Neighbourhood Watch
- Newforge Lane Neighbourhood Watch
- Lavinia Square Neighbourhood Watch
- Ulidia Neighbourhood Watch
- Agra Street Neighbourhood Watch
- Burmah Street Neighbourhood Watch

- Malone Hill Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Malton Fold Neighbourhood Watch
- Shrewsbury Drive Neighbourhood Watch
- Upper Harberton Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Queensbury Neighbourhood Watch
- Malone Court/Mews Neighbourhood Watch
- Dorchester Park N W
- Sandy Row Neighbourhood Watch
- My Lady's Road (Lower)/Lower Ravenhill Road
- Piney Hills Estate Neighbourhood Watch
- Upper Malone Neighbourhood Watch
- North Parade/South Parade/Park Road N Watch

Total: 36

Belfast East

- Glenhoy/Dunraven Neighbourhood Watch
- RACKS
- Richmond Green Neighbourhood Watch
- Ardenlee Parade Neighbourhood Watch
- Laganview Court Neighbourhood Watch
- Marmont Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Palmerston/Larkfield Neighbourhood Watch
- Langtry Court Neighbourhood Watch
- Wandsworth Community Centre
- Richmond Neighbourhood Watch
- Belmont Church Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Palmerston Neighbourhood Watch
- Inverary Neighbourhood Watch
- Larkfield Neighbourhood Watch
- Ulidia Neighbourhood/Jameson Street Neighbourhood Watch
- Palmerston Road (Lower) Neighbourhood Watch
- Palmerston Park N W
- Larkfield Park N W
- Victoria Avenue Sydenham Neighbourhood Watch
- Connsbrook Avneue Neighbourhood Watch
- Wandsworth Junction Neighbourhood Watch
- Upper Sydenham Avenue Neighbourhood Watch
- Old Holywood Rd Neighbourhood Watch
- Kingsley Court NW
- Edgumbe Park Neighbourhood Watch
- The Walled Garden Neighbourhood Watch
- Abetta Residents neighbourhood Watch
- Nettlefield Neighbourhood Watch
- Ballyhackamore Traders Neighbourhood Watch
- Halcombe Street Neighbourhood Watch
- Archdale drive East neighbourhood Watch
- Butterfield Lodge Neighbourhood watch
- Glenmachan Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Norwood Neighbourhood Watch
- Cairnburn Neighbourhood Watch

Total: 35

Belfast West

- Hillhead Neighbourhood Watch
- Meadowhill Grange Neighbourhood Watch

Total: 2

Carrickfergus

- Whitehead Neighbourhood Watch
- Selby and Dromore Neighbourhood Watch
- Fairview Avenue/McCrae's Brae Neighbourhood Watch
- Lumford Avenue Neighbourhood Watch
- Regent Avenue Neighbourhood Watch
- Craigowen Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Donegall Avenue Neighbourhood Watch
- Farm Lodge Neighbourhood Watch
- Old Grange Drive Neighbourhood Watch

Total: 9

Castlereagh

- Gilnahirk Residents Assoc
- Sunderland Road NW
- Upper Gilnahirk NW
- Glenhugh Park/Crescent neighbourhood watch
- Ballyrussell Neighbourhood Watch
- The Crescent Neighbourhood Watch
- Oakwood Avenue Neighbourhood Watch
- Willowbank Drive Neighbourhood Watch
- Downshire Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Millar's Forge Neighbourhood Watch
- Lenaghan Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Cairnshill Court Fold
- Kew Gardens Neighbourhood Watch
- Moneyreagh- Ashdene Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Drumart Drive South Neighbourhood Watch
- Breda Park neighbourhood Watch
- Bapaume/Picardy/Thiepval Neighbourhood Watch
- Gilnahirk Rise Neighbourhood Watch
- Elsmere Park neighbourhood watch
- Cairnshill Road neighbourhood Watch
- Archdale Park Neighbourhood Watch
- St Elizabeth's Court Neighbourhood Watch

Total: 22**Coleraine**

- Heights Community Association
- Garvagh Neighbourhood Watch
- The Creeve Residents Neighbourhood Watch
- Portstewart Community Forum
- Hezlet Court Neighbourhood Watch
- Clifton/Hendra Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Society Court/ Street Neighbourhood Watch
- Castlerock Neighbourhood Watch
- Mill Court Garvagh N W
- Prospect Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Swilly Drive neighbourhood Watch
- Dunsuivnish Avenue Neighbourhood Watch
- Knockancor Drive neighbourhood Watch
- Burnside Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Swilly Road Neighbourhood watch
- Swilly Park neighbourhood Watch
- Dunsuivnish Avenue Neighbourhood Watch
- Dunsuivnish Drive Neighbourhood watch
- Rathain Fold Neighbourhood Watch
- Windyhall/Tullans Pk Neighbourhood Watch

Total: 20**Cookstown**

- Drumnacross Neighbourhood Watch
- Coagh Neighbourhood Watch
- Castle Court/Castle Villas Neighbourhood Watch
- Burn Brae Crescent Neighbourhood Watch
- Dunmore Neighbourhood Watch
- Blackhill/Riverside Drive Community Association
- Millrace and Turnaface Neighbourhood Watch

Total: 7**Craigavon**

- Birches Community Association
- Knocknamuckley Neighbourhood Watch
- Waringstown Neighbourhood Watch
- Pinebank Residents Association
- Canvy Manor Neighbourhood Watch
- Enniscrone Portadown Neighbourhood Watch
- Chasewood Gardens Neighbourhood Watch
- Markville/Oakdene Neighbourhood Watch
- Lakelands Neighbourhood Watch
- Fox St, Alexandra Gdns, Craigavon Ave Neighbourhood Watch
- Oran Fold Neighbourhood Watch
- Oakleigh Fold Neighbourhood Watch
- Derrinraw & Derrycarib Neighbourhood Watch

- Parkmore Neighbourhood Watch
- Garrymore Neighbourhood Watch
- Manor Park neighbourhood Watch
- Derryinver Neighbourhood watch
- Ballyhannon Lodge Neighbourhood Watch
- Gallrock Road neighbourhood Watch
- Birchwood Grange Neighbourhood Watch
- Ballynarry Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Clonmakate Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Timakeel Lodge Neighbourhood watch
- Derrycaw Lane neighbourhood Watch
- Derrylileagh Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Belmont Road Neighbourhood Watch
- The Oaks neighbourhood watch
- Clantilew/Tarthlogue/Drumanphy N Watch
- Drumard Avenue Neighbourhood Watch
- Derrylettiff Road Neighbourhood watch
- Keelmount/Scotch Street Neighbourhood Watch

Total: 31

Derry

- Hampstead Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Fortwilliam Neighbourhood Watch
- Eglinton Neighbourhood Watch
- Maydown Neighbourhood Watch
- Oakfield Neighbourhood Watch
- Brickfield Court neighbourhood Watch
- North & West Housing Neighbourhood watch (APEX)
- Fr Mulvey Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Lowry's Lane/Glenwood Neighbourhood watch
- Glenbrook House Neighbourhood watch
- Blackthorn Manor Neighbourhood Watch
- Beechwood Court Neighbourhood Watch
- Aberfoyle Neighbourhood Watch
- Castle Park/Heather Drive Neighbourhood Watch
- Culmore Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Beechleigh Park Neighbourhood Watch

Total: 16

Down

- Ringdufferin Neighbourhood Watch
- Toye Neighbourhood Watch
- Wallace Hill Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Shore Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Tullyveery Neighbourhood Watch
- Tullykin Neighbourhood Watch
- Pikestone Neighbourhood Watch
- The Drumlins Neighbourhood Watch
- Cluntagh Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Turmennan Road
- Waterfoot Residents Group
- Strangford Avenue Neighbourhood Watch
- Hans Sloane Square Neighbourhood Watch
- Inishvoe Neighbourhood Watch
- Killyleagh High Street Neighbourhood Watch
- Strangford View Neighbourhood Watch
- Gallow's Hill Residents Association
- Quay Street Ardglass Neighbourhood Watch
- Ashdale Gardens Neighbourhood Watch
- Cumber Gardens Neighbourhood Watch
- Shore Road Strangford Neighbourhood Watch
- Killyleagh St Crossgar Neighbourhood Watch
- Merrion Avenue Neighbourhood Watch
- Newline Neighbourhood Watch
- Well Lane Neighbourhood Watch
- Station Road Crossgar N W
- Old Park Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Crawfordstown Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Drumgooland Neighbourhood Watch
- Nutgrove Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Cloughley Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Kennel Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Drumaness Community Neighbourhood Watch
- Darragh Cross Village Neighbourhood Watch

- Loughinisland Neighbourhood Watch
- Darragh Cross Community Association
- Loughinisland/Seaforde Neighbourhood Watch
- The Heights Loughinisland Neighbourhood Watch
- Mary Street Crossgar Neighbourhood Watch
- Clough Neighbourhood Watch
- Woodquarter Lane Neighbourhood Watch
- Legamaddy Neighbourhood Watch
- Ballynoe Neighbourhood Watch
- Glen Road Downpatrick Neighbourhood Watch
- Ballylucas Neighbourhood Watch
- Derryboye Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Ballyalghan Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Glasswater Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Castlerainey Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Clanmaghera Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Decourcey Way Neighbourhood Watch
- Tullywest Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Cathedral Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Cathedral View Neighbourhood Watch
- Ardigon Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Loughinisland Road N W
- Ballykinlar Neighbourhood Watch
- Inch Neighbourhood Watch
- Ballyhornan Central Neighbourhood Watch
- Killard Square Ballyhornan Neighbourhood Watch
- Bishops court Neighbourhood Watch
- Fofanny Neighbourhood Watch
- Dundrum Village Neighbourhood Watch
- St Paul's Close Neighbourhood Watch
- Kilcoo Community Association
- The Quay Neighbourhood Watch
- Wood Road Neighbourhood Watch

Total: 67

Dungannon

- Moygashel Community/Culture Association
- Cunningham's Lane Cross Community Residents' Assoc
- Milltown Area Community Assoc
- Caledon Neighbourhood Watch
- Church Mews N W
- Bush Neighbourhood Watch
- Ardglena/Blacks Lane Neighbourhood Watch
- Brookfield neighbourhood Watch

Total: 8

Fermanagh

- Tedd Neighbourhood Watch
- Drumclay and District Neighbourhood Watch
- Drumgallon Drumawill Neighbourhood Watch
- Benaughlin Neighbourhood Watch
- Mountview Neighbourhood Watch
- Ardtonagh Neighbourhood Watch
- Drumlyon Neighbourhood Watch
- Bellisle Neighbourhood Watch
- Castle Street Irvinestown Neighbourhood Watch
- Killyfole Rosslea Neighbourhood Watch
- Coleshill Neighbourhood Watch
- Derrychara Neighbourhood Watch
- Ballagh Cross Neighbourhood Watch
- Coleshill Neighbourhood Watch

Total: 14

Larne

- Riverdale & District Residents Association
- Kitchener's Avenue Residents' Association
- Sallagh Park Community Association
- Dixon Park Residents Association
- Seacourt Community Council
- Harbour Community Group
- Kilcairn Neighbourhood Watch
- Ballygally Community Development

- Association
- Ballygally Neighbourhood Watch
- Inverbeg Court Neighbourhood Watch
- Argyll View Neighbourhood Watch

Total: 14

Limavady

Total: 0

Lisburn

- Drumlough Rural Watch
- Aberdelghey Park/Gardens Grove
- Thornleigh Neighbourhood Watch
- Ashvale, Dunbeg and Kilwarlin Neighbourhood Watch
- Dundrod Neighbourhood Watch
- Dog Kennel Lane Neighbourhood Watch
- Lombard Residents
- Soldierstown Neighbourhood Watch
- Addison Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Drumbeg Residents Association
- Carrisbrook Neighbourhood Watch
- Upper Limetree Community
- Feumore Neighbourhood Watch
- Carnreagh Neighbourhood Watch
- Coachman's Neighbourhood Watch
- Drumard Court Neighbourhood Watch
- The Dales
- Lyngrove Residents Neighbourhood Watch
- Cairnmore/Monaville Neighbourhood Watch
- Green Lane/Tullynacross Neighbourhood Watch
- Sequoia Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Ferris Avenue Neighbourhood Watch
- Ballygally Community Development Association
- Ballynure Neighbourhood Watch
- Laganvale Mews Neighbourhood Watch
- Bawnhill Road Community Neighbourhood Watch
- Stoneyford Neighbourhood Watch
- Corrstown Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Thornhill Crescent Area Neighbourhood Watch
- Ashvale Neighbourhood Watch
- Kilwarlin Neighbourhood Watch
- Park Lane & Park Street N W
- Dunbeg Park/Kilwarlin N W
- Harmony Fold Neighbourhood Watch
- Walkers Farm Hillsborough Neighbourhood Watch
- Antrim Road Central Lisburn Neighbourhood Watch
- Causeway Meadow Neighbourhood Watch
- Langtry Lodge Moira Neighbourhood Watch
- Main Street Glenavy Neighbourhood Watch
- Rathvarna Neighbourhood Watch
- Ballinderry Neighbourhood Watch
- The Meadows & Glen Close N Watch
- Ballinderry Neighbourhood Watch
- Woodbrook Neighbourhood Watch

Total: 41

Magherafelt

- Beechlands Neighbourhood Watch
- Riverpark Neighbourhood Watch
- Cullnady Neighbourhood Watch
- Edmund Court Neighbourhood Watch
- Killowen Neighbourhood Watch
- Glenburn Neighbourhood Watch

Total: 6

Moyle

- Dunseverick Community Association
- Portcammon Fold N W
- Dunamallaght Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Rathlin Court Neighbourhood Watch

Total: 4**Newry & Mourne**

- Lower Harbour Road NW
- Pinewood Hill, Warrenpoint
- Crieve Court NW Scheme
- Donaghmore Neighbourhood Watch
- Glinn Ree Neighbourhood Watch
- Shinn Neighbourhood Watch
- Avoca Lawns Neighbourhood Watch
- Ashley Heights/Court Residents Association
- Chestnut Grove Neighbourhood Watch
- Shandon Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Riverview Neighbourhood Watch
- Ashfield Avenue Neighbourhood Watch
- Bearna Park Residents Association
- Charlemont Square Bessbrook Neighbourhood Watch
- Kennard Villas Neighbourhood Watch
- Drumcashel Neighbourhood Watch
- Nine Mile Road, Newtownhamilton Neighbourhood Watch
- Ryan Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Crohill Neighbourhood Watch
- Saval Neighbourhood Watch
- Cedar Grove Neighbourhood Watch
- Willow Grove Neighbourhood Watch
- Beechmount Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Elmwood Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Ardfreelin N W
- Mourneview Park Newry N W
- Cortamlet South N W
- Cortamlet North N W
- Benagh Road N W
- Greater Linenhall Square N W
- Saint Clare's Avenue Neighbourhood Watch
- Innisfree Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Ballyholland Road Neighbourhood Watch
- McAteer Villas & Moorhill Road N W
- Rockfield Heights Neighbourhood Watch
- Ballyholland Neighbourhood Watch
- Lower Corraghs/Grinan Lough N Watch
- Chapel Road/St Mary's Villas Neighbourhood Watch
- Acorn Hill Neighbourhood Watch
- Clochain Fold
- Woodside Park Bessbrook Neighbourhood Watch
- Billy's Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Brannock Meadows Neighbourhood Watch
- Ashgrove Avenue Neighbourhood Watch
- Hollywood Grove Neighbourhood Watch
- Carrickvista Bessbrook Neighbourhood Watch
- Fern Court Neighbourhood Watch
- Mourne View Neighbourhood Watch
- McGinn Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Hawood Way Neighbourhood Watch
- Liska Avenue & Villas Neighbourhood Watch
- Brannock Heights Neighbourhood Watch
- Clare House Neighbourhood Watch
- Glenhill Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Windsor Hill Neighbourhood Watch
- Donaghaguy Close Neighbourhood Watch
- Hillside Close Neighbourhood Watch
- Iveagh Avenue neighbourhood Watch
- Brannock Close Neighbourhood Watch
- Lower The Glen Neighbourhood Watch
- Liska Manor neighbourhood Watch
- JF Kennedy Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Old Hall Court Neighbourhood Watch
- Springfield Avenue neighbourhood watch
- Church Street Neighbourhood Watch
- Warrenpoint Road Neighbourhood Watch
- St Rita's Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Carquillan Neighbourhood Watch
- Highfields neighbourhood Watch
- Carnaney Neighbourhood watch
- Rostrevor Road Neighbourhood watch
- Greenpark Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Moygannon Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Rath Road neighbourhood Watch
- Mourne Drive neighbourhood Watch
- Newtown Villas/Road Neighbourhood Watch

- Queen Street Neighbourhood Watch
- Slievefoy Place Neighbourhood Watch
- Rosses Quay neighbourhood Watch
- Greendale Crescent Neighbourhood Watch
- Greendale Crescent Neighbourhood Watch
- Killowen Neighbourhood Watch
- The Forge Neighbourhood Watch
- The Brambles Neighbourhood Watch Kilkeel

Total: 84

Newtownabbey

- Ballynure and District Community Association
- Twinburn
- Rogan Manor Residents Association
- Whitehouse Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Ollardale Community Group
- Dermont Residents Neighbourhood Watch
- Carnvue Residents Neighbourhood Watch
- Carnhill Neighbourhood Watch
- Glenkeen and Lenamore Neighbourhood Watch
- Annas Grove Area Neighbourhood Watch
- Cashel/Ballyalton Neighbourhood Watch
- Straid Village Neighbourhood Watch
- Kings Gardens Neighbourhood Watch
- Fernagh Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Kings Crescent Neighbourhood Watch
- Bracken Way Neighbourhood Watch
- The Cairn Neighbourhood Watch
- Glendermere Heights Neighbourhood Watch
- Highgrove Neighbourhood Watch
- Innis/Iona Neighbourhood watch
- Church/Glebe Neighbourhood Watch
- Kimberley Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Glenmount Neighbourhood Watch

Total: 23

North Down

- Clandeboye Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Harbour Ward (Southwell Road)
- Grange Avenue Neighbourhood Watch
- Station Road N W
- Church Avenue Neighbourhood Watch
- Helen's Bay and Crawfordsburn Residents Association
- Crawfordsburn Road NW
- Meadow Way/Burnside Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Brandon Grove Neighbourhood Watch
- Cargoes Crescent and Cootehall Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Fort Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Cootehall Road/Cooleen Gardens Neighbourhood Watch
- Briarwood Neighbourhood Watch
- Sheridan Drive Neighbourhood Watch
- Tughan Court Neighbourhood Watch
- Belgravia Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Towerview Gardens, Bangor, Neighbourhood Watch
- Innisbrook Gardens Neighbourhood Watch
- Grey's Point Helen's Bay Neighbourhood Watch
- Corvally Court Neighbourhood Watch
- Pinehill Neighbourhood Watch
- Briarwood Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Craigdarragh Neighbourhood Watch
- Woodlands Neighbourhood Watch
- Tonic Fold Neighbourhood Watch
- Cranley Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Stratford Neighbourhood Watch
- Vernon Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Cedar Grove 2 Neighbourhood Watch

Total: 29

Omagh

- Bankmore Residents Assoc Neighbourhood watch
- Ardmore/Sperrin N'hood Watch
- Campsie Residents Group
- Beragh Neighbourhood Watch
- Trillick N'hood Watch
- Gillygooley Neighbourhood Watch
- Lisanelly Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Retreat Heights Neighbourhood Watch
- Mountjoy Neighbourhood Watch
- Gallow's Hill Neighbourhood Watch
- Brookmount Heights Tenants Association
- Townview Avenue, Avenue North and Avenue South Neighbourhood Watch
- Tamlaght Road Residents Association
- Sunningdale and Railway View Neighbourhood Watch
- Ashley Gardens, Cannonhill and Coolnagard Drive Neighbourhood Watch
- Kevlin Road and Cannondale Neighbourhood Watch
- Festival Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Anderson Gardens Neighbourhood Watch
- Brookvalley Neighbourhood Watch
- Knocksilla Neighbourhood Watch
- Culmore/O'Kane Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Cranny/Gavaghey Neighbourhood Watch
- McClay Park neighbourhood Watch
- Racrane Court
- Duncan Park Neighbourhood Watch
- Ecclesville Heights Neighbourhood Watch
- St Julians House Neighbourhood Watch
- Fox Park Neighbourhood watch

Total: 28**Strabane**

- Sion Mills Neighbourhood Watch
- Ardstraw neighbourhood Watch
- Castlegore Neighbourhood watch
- Millbrook Gardens Neighbourhood Watch
- Hospital Road Neighbourhood Watch
- Laurel Drive Neighbourhood Watch

Total: 6**Fold Schemes**

- | | | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| ■ Abbey Court | ■ Cullingtree Fold | ■ Glenravel Fold | ■ Loughview Fold |
| ■ Ardigh Fold | ■ Curran Fold | ■ Gortgole Fold | ■ Macneice Fold |
| ■ Ballinascreen Fold | ■ Dean Crooks Fold | ■ Hamilton Fold | ■ Maine Fold |
| ■ Belsize Court | ■ Deerfin Fold | ■ Hillbank Fold | ■ McClay Fold |
| ■ Benevenagh Fold | ■ Derg Fold | ■ Hillside Court | ■ Meadowell Fold |
| ■ Blaris Fold | ■ Donard Fold | ■ Inis Fold | ■ Mill Brea Fold |
| ■ Bradagh Fold | ■ Donovan Fold/
Court | ■ Inverary Fold | ■ Monasterbane |
| ■ Bronte Fold | ■ Drumhaw Fold | ■ Iverna Fold | ■ Mount Royal Fold |
| ■ Brookvale Fold | ■ Edenderry Fold | ■ KLT Fold | ■ Mullincross Fold |
| ■ Brownhill Fold | ■ Fergus Fold | ■ Kerrington Court | ■ Ollar Fold |
| ■ Carrickblackler
Fold | ■ Fold Mews | ■ Kingsway Fold | ■ Patricks Fold |
| ■ Chapelfields Fold | ■ Forthriver Fold | ■ Knockmoy Fold | ■ Rathain Fold |
| ■ Clanrye Fold | ■ Fortwilliam Fold | ■ Lagan Fold | ■ Rathain Fold
Annex |
| ■ Colman Fold | ■ Foyle Fold | ■ Lavery Fold | ■ Riversley Fold |
| ■ Corliss Fold | ■ Fruithill Fold | ■ Lawnfield Court | ■ Roe Fold |
| ■ Cromlyn Fold | ■ Glen Fold | ■ Lir Fold | ■ Scrabo Fold |
| | | ■ Loopland Fold | |

- | | | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| ■ Sliabh Dubh Manor | ■ Springvale Fold | ■ Tobar Fold | ■ Valley Fold |
| ■ Skerries Fold | ■ St. Brigid's Fold | ■ Toberdoney Fold | ■ Waveney Fold |
| ■ Spafield Fold | ■ St Paul's Fold | ■ Tullaghmurry Fold | |
| | ■ Tearmann Fold | ■ Tullyvullan Fold | |

Total: 78

These 78 folds come under 1 umbrella so are counted as 1

Total: 680

HMP Maghaberry: Full Body Searching

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Justice why the alternatives to strip searching, that he saw in use in prisons in Britain and Ireland, are not suitable for Maghaberry Prison.

(AQW 8925/11-15)

Mr Ford: The full body searching method I observed during my visit to Birmingham Prison is the same as that applied in Maghaberry Prison. I did not see any alternative to full body searching in use there. I will be meeting officials to discuss the detailed evaluation of my visit to Portlaoise Prison, and the recently completed Review of Full Body Imaging Scanners in the coming weeks.

Non-jury Trials: Cost

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the cost of each non-jury trial over the last ten years.

(AQW 8931/11-15)

Mr Ford: Estimating the detailed costs of individual cases requires a manual exercise. Extracting the information required to answer this question would incur disproportionate cost.

Ronnie Graham: Sexual Offenders Treatment Programme

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether Ronald Terence Graham has completed a Sexual Offenders Treatment Programme during his current sentence.

(AQW 8932/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information requested constitutes sensitive personal data as defined at section 2 of the Data Protection Act 1998. The disclosure of such information is likely to breach the data subject's rights under the Act and would be incompatible with the Data Protection Principles. The information cannot therefore be provided as requested.

RUC George Cross Foundation Regulations 2002

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice, under the RUC George Cross Foundation Regulations 2002, when and by what process the current trustees were appointed, or reappointed.

(AQW 8943/11-15)

Mr Ford: The RUC George Cross Foundation comprises a Chairman and a Board of five Trustees. All appointments were made on 25 July 2002 by the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in accordance with the RUC George Cross Foundation Regulations 2002.

Two of the trustees are statutory nominations of the Chief Constable and the Policing Board, as provided for in the regulations. The Chairman and trustees' initial term of appointment was for five years with the option for re-appointment when the initial term of office expired. The Secretary of State re-appointed the Chairman and four of the trustees on 25 July 2007. The fifth trustee was re-appointed on October 2007 following a formal recruitment exercise.

All re-appointments were made in line with the Office for the Commissioner for Public Appointments (OCPA) Code of Practice which existed at the time.

A new appointments process will launch shortly and will be conducted in line with the Commissioner for Public Appointments Northern Ireland (CPANI) Code of Practice for Ministerial Public Appointments in Northern Ireland.

Legal Aid: Occupy Belfast

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether Legal Aid has been granted to defendants who are part of the Occupy Belfast movement; and if so, how much has been paid to date.

(AQW 9004/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service has no record of any legal aid applications arising from the actions of the Occupy Belfast movement.

Prison Service: Exit Scheme

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice whether he can give an assurance that payments made under the Northern Ireland Prison Service Exit Scheme will be subject to taxation in 2012/13, as indicated by officials to the Committee for Justice.

(AQW 9017/11-15)

Mr Ford: Those leaving the Northern Ireland Prison Service under the terms of the Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme must be taxed in accordance with the rules of H M Revenue and Customs. Consequently, any member of staff with a leaving date of 31 March 2012 will be taxed in the 2011/12 tax year. Officials advised the Justice Committee of this change at a meeting on 9 February 2012.

Courthouse Closures: Impact on Transport Costs

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice when he intends to initiate discussions with the Minister for Regional Development in relation to increasing public transport services, in the event of the proposed court house closures, to ensure access to justice for all court users.

(AQW 9073/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Hearing Centre consultation exercise specifically sought views on the impact that the proposed closures would have on court users. The availability of public transport has been raised at the public meetings which formed part of the consultation exercise and I wish to consider the issues raised by consultees before making any decision. Until I do so, I currently have no plans to discuss this matter with the Minister for Regional Development.

Court Cases: Taxing Master

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) how many high cost cases have come before the Taxing Master in each of the last ten years; and (ii) what was the total defence pay-out for these cases.

(AQW 9076/11-15)

Mr Ford: Very High Cost Cases (VHCCs) were introduced by the Legal Aid for Crown Court Proceedings (Costs) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2005 and the first claims for payment were assessed in 2008. The tables below give a breakdown of the number of claims assessed in VHCCs and the total amount of the assessment for each year since the assessments began. The criteria for certification were tightened in 2009 before VHCCs were abolished in 2011. There are currently 34 VHCC claims awaiting assessment.

CLAIMS UNDER THE LEGAL AID FOR CROWN COURT PROCEEDINGS (COSTS) RULES (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2005

Year	No of claims assessed	Value of assessments
2008	64	£6m

Year	No of claims assessed	Value of assessments
2009	532	£27m
2010	175	£20.2m
2011	51	£3m
Total	822	£56.2m

CLAIMS UNDER THE LEGAL AID FOR CROWN COURT PROCEEDINGS (COSTS) (AMENDMENT) RULES (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2009

Year	No of claims assessed	Approx Value of assessments
2010	1	£36,000
2011	49	£2.4m
2012	25	£2.2m
Total	75	£4.6m

Courthouse Closures: Consultation

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in light of Northern Ireland Court Service's presentation on the consultation on court boundaries to the Committee for Justice on 27 May 2010, which stated that 'the proposals will not reduce the number of court venues in Northern Ireland, nor will they impact on the venues where they currently sit' and 'the purpose of the proposals was not to diminish the number of courts' to detail (i) what has changed since this consultation; and (ii) on what date a decision was taken to consult on proposed court house closures.

(AQW 9077/11-15)

Mr Ford: The proposals on changing court boundaries to create a single territorial jurisdiction were welcomed by consultees and will afford additional flexibility for listing Magistrates' Court and County Court business.

The NI Courts and Tribunals Service has developed savings plans to deliver required running cost efficiencies. The current consultation on proposals to close Hearing Centres notes the challenging economic circumstances facing all public sector bodies including the Courts and Tribunals Service. I approved the development of this consultation paper in July 2011.

Rural White Paper

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Justice whether his Department has been in contact with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in relation to the development of the Rural White Paper.

(AQW 9082/11-15)

Mr Ford: I met with the Agriculture and Rural Development Minister in December to discuss the issue of rural crime. My Department is represented on DARD's Rural White Paper project group. Most recently, in early February, my officials have been consulted on the Rural White Paper Action Plan.

The purpose of the ongoing contact between my Department and DARD is to ensure that community safety issues are adequately reflected in the Rural White Paper and Action Plan.

Rural Communities: Safety

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Justice what role his Department has had in creating vibrant, sustainable and safer rural communities.

(AQW 9083/11-15)

Mr Ford: The forthcoming Community Safety Strategy will support efforts to make rural communities safer through preventing and reducing rural crime. At a local level Community Safety Partnerships deliver initiatives in rural areas across Northern Ireland that contribute to the reduction of crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour.

There are a range of initiatives to prevent and reduce rural crime from local Neighbourhood Watch and Rural Watch schemes, to trailer marking schemes and crime prevention advice to rural groups.

Many Community Safety Partnerships have held successful trailer marking schemes tailored to the particular needs of the rural community, with over twenty events held over the past six months and further events planned throughout the year.

The new Policing and Community Safety Partnerships, due to be established in April 2012, will have a key role in engaging and empowering individuals and communities to find solutions to locally identified concerns. Organisations representing the rural community can take the opportunity to engage with their local Policing and Community Safety Partnership, ensuring that their voice is heard.

Turning to Anti-Social Behaviour, in Northern Ireland we have adopted a multi-agency partnership to tackle this issue using a graduated approach of prevention, intervention and enforcement to tackle anti-social behaviour. This approach has contributed to a reduction of over 20% in the incidence of anti-social behaviour across Northern Ireland since 2008.

In the coming months I will publish a new executive strategy 'Building Safer, Shared and Confident Communities' which will set out the strategic direction for reducing crime, anti-social behaviour, and fear of crime in Northern Ireland over the next five years.

The new strategy will emphasise the importance of collaborative working and securing the commitment of key stakeholders in addressing wider social issues which are a factor in crime and anti-social behaviour.

Finally, Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland has commenced an inspection on how the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland addresses anti-social behaviour with a view to publishing a final report in spring 2012. I await the outcome of this inspection, and will consider any recommendations arising from it.

Community Safety Strategy: Priorities

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Justice when the New Community Safety Strategy will be published; and what are the strategy's priorities.

(AQW 9084/11-15)

Mr Ford: The new Community Safety Strategy is scheduled to be presented to the Justice Committee on 22 March and I hope to get Executive approval in by May, with publication soon thereafter.

The strategy's priorities which contribute to the Department of Justice's wider vision of a fair, just and safer community are:

- Safer communities, with lower levels of crime and anti-social behaviour;
- Shared Communities, where everyone's rights are respected in a shared and cohesive community; and
- Confident communities, in which people feel safe and have confidence in the justice agencies that serve them.

Rural Communities: Safety

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Justice what action his Department is taking to (i) keep rural communities safe; and (ii) reduce rural crime and anti-social behaviour.

(AQW 9086/11-15)

Mr Ford: The forthcoming Community Safety Strategy will support efforts to make rural communities safer through preventing and reducing rural crime. At a local level Community Safety Partnerships deliver initiatives in rural areas across Northern Ireland that contribute to the reduction of crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour.

There are a range of initiatives to prevent and reduce rural crime from local Neighbourhood Watch and Rural Watch schemes, to trailer marking schemes and crime prevention advice to rural groups.

Many Community Safety Partnerships have held successful trailer marking schemes tailored to the particular needs of the rural community, with over twenty events held over the past six months and further events planned throughout the year.

The new Policing and Community Safety Partnerships, due to be established in April 2012, will have a key role in engaging and empowering individuals and communities to find solutions to locally identified concerns. Organisations representing the rural community can take the opportunity to engage with their local Policing and Community Safety Partnership, ensuring that their voice is heard.

Turning to Anti-Social Behaviour, in Northern Ireland we have adopted a multi-agency partnership to tackle this issue using a graduated approach of prevention, intervention and enforcement to tackle anti-social behaviour. This approach has contributed to a reduction of over 20% in the incidence of anti-social behaviour across Northern Ireland since 2008.

In the coming months I will publish a new executive strategy 'Building Safer, Shared and Confident Communities' which will set out the strategic direction for reducing crime, anti-social behaviour, and fear of crime in Northern Ireland over the next five years.

The new strategy will emphasise the importance of collaborative working and securing the commitment of key stakeholders in addressing wider social issues which are a factor in crime and anti-social behaviour.

Finally, Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland has commenced an inspection on how the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland addresses anti-social behaviour with a view to publishing a final report in spring 2012. I await the outcome of this inspection, and will consider any recommendations arising from it.

Prison Service: Exit Scheme

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the situation where almost 400 employees of the Prison Service have applied to, and are eligible to leave under, the Voluntary Staff Exit Scheme and remain uncertain about their future.

(AQW 9159/11-15)

Mr Ford: 544 members of the Northern Ireland Prison Service applied for the Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme. For operational reasons it is not possible to allow all applicants to leave at this time. 224 applications have so far been approved of which 151 will leave on 31 March 2012. The departure of 73 individuals has been delayed for operational reasons.

The remaining 320 of the applications received remain under consideration.

Following the departure of those individuals due to leave on 31 March NIPS management will review the situation and agree the best way to proceed. Management will remain in contact with those who have applied for the Scheme.

Prosecution: Alternatives

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Justice for an update on his plans for alternatives to prosecution.
(AQO 1483/11-15)

Mr Ford: It is vital that our criminal justice system tackles offending behaviour in an effective and proportionate way. As part of this, the Department of Justice is developing three new alternatives to

prosecution for individuals who commit relatively minor offences and who are likely to go on to lead law-abiding lives.

Firstly, a police issued fixed penalty will create a power for police to dispose of certain offences by giving a first-time or non-habitual offender a fixed penalty to be paid within 28 days. I intend to give the police this important new tool in June of this year.

Secondly, for offenders who want to address their offending behaviour, we introduced conditional cautions in last year's Justice Act. This powerful new provision enables prosecutors to attach rehabilitative and reparative conditions to cautions which the offender must comply with or face prosecution. We are currently working with justice agencies and anticipate that we will introduce these new measures later this year.

Finally, in the forthcoming Faster, Fairer Justice Bill, I intend to introduce prosecutorial fines which would allow the Public Prosecution Service to impose fines for a broader range of minor offences; this includes a mechanism to make direct compensation payments to victims.

These alternative disposals will reduce time spent by police on administration allowing manpower to be redeployed to the frontline, and will also reduce the burden on the courts and prosecutors enabling us to make more effective use of our limited resources and to speed up the justice system.

Police Ombudsman: Interim Chief Executive

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Justice to outline the changes in the delegation of responsibilities within the Office of the Police Ombudsman arising from the creation of the position of interim Chief Executive.

(AQO 1482/11-15)

Mr Ford: The change in the delegation of responsibilities within the Office of the Police Ombudsman did not arise from the appointment of an interim Chief Executive Officer but from the departure of the Police Ombudsman before the identification or appointment of a successor. Arrangements were properly made by the outgoing Ombudsman to ensure that the statutory functions of the Police Ombudsman could be exercised in that period.

With the exception of the power to change the authorisation of delegation, all the Police Ombudsman's functions are delegated to the appropriate staff of the Ombudsman's Office.

The appointment of an interim Chief Executive arose from the Police Ombudsman's signalling his intention to resign by the end of January 2012 and from the absence of a substantive Chief Executive in the Office during the period of transition.

As previously stated in this Chamber the Police Ombudsman approached my Department for assistance in identifying an interim Chief Executive in November 2011. My Department then sought assistance from the Head of the Civil Service and the Department of Finance and Personnel.

Subsequently – and after seeking independent legal advice – the Police Ombudsman advised me on 12 January 2012 of his decision to remain technically as Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland. He formally delegated his functions as Police Ombudsman to appropriate levels within the Office on 28 January 2012.

Prisoners: Dissident Republicans

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Justice how many dissident republican prisoners are currently on remand.

(AQO 1485/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Prison Service does not classify prisoners as dissident republicans.

There are currently 36 separated republican prisoners in custody.

The total number of separated prisoners on remand is 23. This figure includes those awaiting trial.

Prison Service: Senior Management

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Justice how he will ensure that the Northern Ireland Prison Service will continue to run effectively following the imminent departure of the Director General and the Change Manager.

(AQW 9290/11-15)

Mr Ford: As I told the Assembly on 6 March, a team of people are working on the reform of the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

A Strategic Efficiency and Effectiveness Programme (SEE) Board meets every month to consider progress reports and to make decisions about review recommendations. The SEE Board is chaired by the Director General and is comprised of Executive Directors and Governors. The SEE Board is supported by a full time programme manager and support staff. The progress of the SEE Programme is monitored internally by the Prison Service Management Board (PSMB) and externally through the Prison Reform Oversight Group (PROG). PSMB directors include a former Head of the National Offender Management Service and a former PSNI Deputy Chief Constable, both of whom were members of the Prison Review Team. In addition, the work of the PROG is informed by a departmental sub-group chaired by the DOJ Permanent Secretary. This group includes representatives from the Probation Board and the DHSSPS. It has also recently been confirmed that the DHSSPS Permanent Secretary will sit on the Prison Reform Oversight Group.

I am confident that the necessary foundations for the fundamental reform of the Prison Service are now in place and that the Service is well placed to respond to the changes necessary in the years ahead. The structures outlined above will drive and monitor the reform programme, and every effort is being made to find a high calibre candidate to replace Colin McConnell as soon as possible. A new Organisational Change Manager has already been appointed and he will begin to familiarise himself with the issues at hand before he formally takes on his new role. A number of additional appointments are currently under consideration to provide further expertise and support as the momentum of the reform programme gathers pace.

Prison Service: Lisnevin Site

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the future of the Prison Service site at Lisnevin, Millisle.

(AQO 1484/11-15)

Mr Ford: The prison population has risen sharply in recent times. An estate strategy is being prepared to address the population growth and the associated overcrowding issue. As part of this strategy, consideration is being given to a number of sites that may offer the potential to provide additional, contingency accommodation. These sites include Millisle.

As yet, there are no plans for the future use of the Millisle site. If a recommendation is made in the estate strategy then this will be subject to full public consultation before any decision is made.

The estate strategy is currently being finalised and I will get sight of it in mid March after which it will go to the Justice Committee for discussion on 29 March.

Police Service: Enhanced Severance Payments

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Justice what is the total amount of enhanced severance paid up to March 2012 to officers taking early retirement from the PSNI.

(AQO 1486/11-15)

Mr Ford: The total amount of enhanced severance paid to officers taking early retirement from the PSNI to date is £501m.

National Crime Agency

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Justice to outline any discussions he has had with the Westminster Government regarding the establishment of the National Crime Agency.

(AQO 1487/11-15)

Mr Ford: I last met with the Home Secretary in January this year and the establishment of the National Crime Agency (NCA) formed part of those discussions in particular the need for any new arrangements to take account of devolved issues in Northern Ireland.

My officials are in regular discussions with the Home Office on the establishment of the NCA.

Prison Service: Exit Scheme

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the progression of the Prison Service redundancy scheme and the timescale for full implementation.

(AQO 1488/11-15)

Mr Ford: 544 members of the Northern Ireland Prison Service applied for the Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme. 224 applications have so far been approved of which 151 will leave on 31 March 2012. The departure of 73 individuals has been delayed for operational reasons. The remaining 320 of the applications received remain under consideration.

Supergrass Trial: Cost

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Justice how much has been spent on conducting the recent supergrass trial.

(AQO 1489/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are a number of cost elements associated with the case of *The Crown v Haddock & Others* including those of the police, Public Prosecution Service, prisons, the courts and legal aid.

In relation to police costs, it will take a little time for these to be assessed but I have asked for the information to be provided to the Justice Committee in due course.

The estimated cost to the Public Prosecution Service is in the region of £520,000. This includes counsel fees and the salary and associated expense of staff who worked on the case.

The estimated cost to the Prison Service for the custody and transport of the defendants totalled £768,605.

Judicial, staff and court accommodation costs are estimated at £219,000. This includes the additional court facility provided at Headline Building.

In terms of legal aid, I shall provide the final costs once these are known. Claims have not yet been submitted in respect of this trial, as the case has only very recently been completed. As the case was certified as a Very High Cost Case the fees will be assessed by the Taxing Master. It is not possible to provide an estimate of the final legal aid bill until the claims made by legal representatives are submitted and assessed.

Antisocial Behaviour: Foyle

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Justice to what he attributes the 60 percent reduction of recorded incidents of anti-social behaviour in Foyle over the past year.

(AQO 1490/11-15)

Mr Ford: Building safer communities by preventing anti-social behaviour and reducing the harm it causes to communities is a key priority for my Department.

Members will be aware of the graduated approach which my Department has adopted to address this type of behaviour. This approach - which is based on prevention, intervention, and enforcement measures - has contributed to a reduction of over 20% in anti-social behaviour incidents since 2008.

While the reduction in anti-social incidents in Foyle is to be welcomed my understanding, from the figures published by PSNI in their ASB incident monthly update to 31 January 2012, is that there has been a 23.2% reduction in ASB incidents over the past year.

This reduction in recorded incidents of anti-social behaviour in Foyle can be attributed to the graduated approach and local partnership working between statutory, community and voluntary sectors and to address locally identified issues of concern.

This approach is evident in initiatives such as the City Community Safety Warden Scheme, Community Safety Forums, Challenge Underage Drinking and Drink Think which operate in the Foyle area.

The new Community Safety Strategy, which will be published in the coming months, will build on the graduated approach and will set out proposals to address anti-social behaviour through working in greater partnership regionally and locally.

Department for Regional Development

A5: Inquiry

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development what purpose the Inspector's Inquiry and report on the A5 will now serve, given his announcement on 14 February 2012 that work on the road will begin.

(AQW 8317/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): As the Member will be aware, the announcement of the upgrade of significant elements of the A5 to dual carriageway is part of a balanced package of improvements to the strategic road network. I have made it clear that progression of the A5 (through completion of statutory procedures and commencement of construction) is subject to the outcome of the public inquiry held last year. The announcement does not prejudice the outcome of the Inspector's report, nor compromise its independence.

My Department recently received the Inspector's report and recommendations which will be given careful consideration. This will allow further development of the scheme, which will address the recommendations made by the Inspector that have been accepted by my Department, in relation to issues raised at the local inquiries.

Equality Impact Assessments and Public Consultations: DRD Spend

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how much his Department has spent on (i) Equality Impact Assessments; and (ii) public consultations in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8364/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The money spent on Equality Impact Assessments and other public consultations in each of the last 3 years is set out in the table below.

Financial Year	EQIA Costs	Consultation Costs	Total Costs
2008/09	NIL	£50,222.73	£50,222.73
2009/10	£22,844.86	£22,815.67	£45,660.53
2010/11	£7,893.19	£43,472.77	£51,365.96

Newry Southern Relief Road

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the estimated cost of the proposed Southern Relief Road for Newry.

(AQW 8451/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it is continuing to develop the proposal to provide a Newry Southern Relief Road. This involves the provision of a crossing of the Newry River and Canal, providing a link between the A1 Belfast to Dublin dual carriageway and the A2 Newry to Warrenpoint dual carriageway.

Roads Service officials further advise that a number of broadly defined potential corridors have been considered for the provision of this relief road, and these have been identified in a feasibility study report published in November 2008.

Officials report that preliminary cost estimates, based on typical unit costs, have been prepared for indicative route alignments within each route corridor. These estimates range from £100m to £211m, and the feasibility study has indicated that the scheme would be expected to provide significant economic benefits.

Cyclists: North Down

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department has taken to improve provision for cyclists in the North Down area over the last five financial years.

(AQW 8459/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that over the last five years, it has provided the following cycling measures in the North Down Council area:

- 1 km of advisory cycle lanes at Abbey Street and Newtownards Road, Bangor;
- a signed cycle route from Helens Bay to Newtownards (this is part of the Strangford Lough Cycle Trail);
- Advanced Stop Lines at a number of junctions throughout Bangor town centre, some of which include short feeder lanes; and
- preparation of an existing footway for shared use to extend the existing cycle track along the A2 Belfast Road from Crawfordsburn Avenue to the junction of Ballyrobert Road.

Currently, there are approximately 20 kms of cycle lanes in the North Down Council area for which my Roads Service is responsible. Roads Service will continue to implement provision for cycling in line with the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan, which includes the North Down area, subject to the level of funding available.

Details of completed and proposed cycle lane schemes can be found in Roads Service's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from my Department's internet site at the web address below, once they have been presented to local Councils:

http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information/cinformatiotype-results.htm?signpost=Customer+information&informationType=Roads+Service+reports+to+councils

Cycle Lanes: North Down

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Regional Development how many cycle lanes there are in North Down; and whether he has any plans to increase the number in the future.

(AQW 8460/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to my answer to his Assembly Question AQW 8459/11-15.

Ground-penetrating Radar Surveys

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the use of ground penetrating radar surveys to protect construction workers by identifying the depth of underground utilities; and whether he has any plans to adopt this technology.

(AQW 8545/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it carried out a trial of ground penetrating radar some years ago. As the trial failed to accurately locate the line and depth of all underground services, no further use was made of these surveys.

Roads Service is currently working with the construction industry in carrying out a further trial to establish whether there has been improved accuracy with such surveys. A decision has not yet been taken regarding the future use of this technology.

Roads Service: Utility Companies

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Regional Development what measures are in place to ensure that Roads Service is fulfilling its responsibilities in ensuring that utility companies accurately record the location, depth and line of their services.

(AQW 8546/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: It is an offence under Article 39(4) of The Street Works (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 (the Order) for a street works undertaker to fail to comply with his duties under Article 39, including those duties under Article 39(2) as prescribed in The Street Works (Records) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004.

My Department's Roads Service has advised that it is not aware of any offences committed under Article 39(4) of the Order. Therefore, Roads Service has not found it necessary to take forward any prosecutions under these powers. However, utility companies have been asked to consider quality assurance of new installations with specific regard to accuracy of record drawings. This item will be discussed at the next meeting of the Northern Ireland Road Authority and Utilities Committee.

Postage and Printing Costs

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department, and its arm's-length bodies, give elected representatives the choice of receiving reports and all other correspondence by email to minimise postage and printing costs.

(AQW 8568/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department and its Arm's Length Bodies respond to requests from Members of the Legislative Assembly for the provision of reports and other correspondence electronically. In many cases responses are already provided in the format in which requests for information are received.

There is also a requirement, under the guidance issued by OFMDFM on the 'Distribution of Departmental Publications and Consultation documents', to provide hard copies of some documents to certain recipients including political representatives, parliamentary contacts and Legal Deposit and other libraries.

The Department also follows the arrangements for laying documents in the Northern Ireland Assembly set out in the OFMDFM 'Guidance on the Laying, Presenting and Depositing of Papers in the NI Assembly.'

Hillhall Road, Lisburn

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQO 1307/11-15, to detail the cost of the minor improvement scheme to enhance visibility for motorists on the Hillhall Road, Lisburn.

(AQW 8569/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that pursuant to AQO 1307/11-15, it is estimated that the minor improvement scheme, currently ongoing on the Hillhall Road, will cost £300k which includes land costs, construction and alterations to existing utility company apparatus.

TEN-T Network: Core Node

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 8031/11-15, (i) to detail the criteria for inclusion as a Core Node on the TEN-T network; (ii) to outline the basis for Derry's inclusion as a Core Node; and (iii) whether any discussions have taken place at North-South Ministerial Council Transport meetings in relation to the extension of the mainline rail network from Derry to Cork. **(AQW 8582/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy:

- (i) The European Commission identified the Core Nodes of the TEN-T Network based on its methodology "The New Trans-European Transport Network Policy – Planning and Implementation Issues". This is a very detailed and complex document. However, analysis of the document suggests that core nodes have been selected based on the following criteria:
- MEGA cities according to ESPON with more than 0.5 million inhabitants;
 - conurbations or city clusters which exceed 1 million inhabitants;
 - cities or conurbations located at branching or crossing points on the TEN-T Core Network; or
 - ports with an annual transshipment volume of at least 1 % of the total transshipment volume of freight by all EU seaports.
- (ii) Londonderry is of significant strategic importance, not just to Northern Ireland but to Great Britain and to the Republic of Ireland. The North-West is one of the most isolated and peripheral regions of the European Union and has high levels of economic and social deprivation. Inclusion of Londonderry as a core node will provide the Department with greater opportunity to avail of European funding for transport links to and from Londonderry. This will make the City a more attractive option for inward investment and development of the surrounding region by promoting access to the single market.

Geographically, Londonderry is an obvious border crossing point linking Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland. In addition, Londonderry has the potential to become an important gateway between the EU and neighbouring North Western states.

As a result, inclusion of Londonderry on the TEN-T core network fits within the overall objective of the TEN-T, which is to provide a framework for the development of infrastructure for the smooth functioning of the internal market and for ensuring economic, social and territorial cohesion and improved accessibility across the EU.

- (iii) The specific issue of extending the mainline rail network from Cork to Londonderry has not been raised at North-South Ministerial Council (NSMC) Transport meetings. The focus of railway issues at recent NSMC Transport meetings has been on improvements to the Dublin to Belfast line. In 2008, the NSMC Transport meeting noted that there were no plans to build a rail link between Sligo and Londonderry through Donegal.

NOTE: ESPON: Metropolitan European Growth Areas in the European Spatial Planning Observatory Network's Atlas 2006

Street Lights: Theft

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the value of the electrical cable and fittings stolen from street lights in the last twelve months; and the cost of replacing these components. **(AQW 8631/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the total cost of replacing the stolen cables and repairing associated damage is currently estimated to be in the region of £330,000, although the scrap value of the cables stolen would be substantially less than the replacement costs.

All incidents have been reported to the PSNI and other bodies in accordance with my Department's guidelines for dealing with theft of assets.

Manholes: Theft

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the value of the gratings stolen from manholes in the last twelve months; and the cost of replacement.

(AQW 8632/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the total cost of replacing stolen gratings from manholes, in the last 12 months, is currently estimated to be in the region of £12,000, although the scrap value of the gratings stolen would be substantially less than the replacement costs.

Northern Ireland Water has advised that it does not hold records of the value of manhole or other covers stolen or the cost of replacement. It would, however, estimate that, during the past 12 months, the cost of replacing stolen manhole or other covers was £33,500.

Londonderry Railway Station: Building Work

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) what building works are planned for Londonderry Railway Station; (ii) the reasons for this building work; and (iii) the estimated cost of the work.

(AQW 8666/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink advise that, at present, no building works are planned for Londonderry station other than routine maintenance and pre-planned renewals which will include the scheduled upgrade of CCTV systems at a cost of £20,000.

Londonderry Railway Station: Security

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) to detail the current level of security provision at Londonderry Railway Station, including the times at which it is provided; (ii) the reasons for this level of security; (iii) what is the cost of this level of provision; and (iv) whether the level of security provision currently employed is related to the recent reduction in staffing hours.

(AQW 8670/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Security at railway stations and in general is an operational matter for Translink who have advised me as follows regarding the situation at Londonderry Railway Station:-

- (i) Security provision hours have recently been extended at Londonderry Railway Station in response to increased vandalism occasioned to civil engineering trains which were stabled in Londonderry sidings. These civil engineering trains are being deployed to Londonderry to support the commencement of Track Safety Improvement Works now on-going between Londonderry and Coleraine. It would not be appropriate to detail the levels of security at any location other than to say it should be sufficient and proportionate to protect company assets and it is continually reviewed.
- (ii) See (i).
- (iii) It would not be appropriate to detail the costs of security at any location other than to say it should be sufficient and proportionate to protect company assets. Equally, all security is provided by designated companies who are selected through competitive tender, therefore we are satisfied with the requisite quality and costs of same.
- (iv) Security provision is not related to recent reduction in staffing.

Metro Services: South Belfast

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the reduction in Metro services and the impact it has had on the Annadale and Belvoir communities in South Belfast.

(AQW 8677/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The provision of Metro services is an operational matter for Translink.

Translink has advised me that to make the best use of resources, it needs to make reductions in the frequency of some Metro services and/or combine services where passenger numbers were not high on an ongoing basis.

In regard to services in Annadale and Belvoir, previously the level of service provided on the No. 29 route was maintained because funding from external stakeholders was available. This is no longer the case. As a result, timetable adjustments on this route came into effect from 1 September 2011. There was no reduction in service provision to the Belvoir area at this time.

Translink has advised me that elected representatives were advised of these changes in August 2011, prior to implementation of any changes.

Following continuous monitoring of the services it provides, Translink has decided that from 27 February 2012 an additional two journeys in each direction (Monday to Friday) and three on Saturdays between Annadale and Belfast city centre will be made by diverting other services.

Bus Routes: Derry to Dublin

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 7591/11-15, and given the commitment in the draft Programme for Government to provide financial and other support across Government to ensure the success of the City of Culture, whether he will ensure that a full bus service operates from Derry to Dublin throughout 2013.

(AQW 8681/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Scheduled international bus services between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are provided within an open market and a number of operators including Translink, offer bus connections to meet passenger demand for travel between Londonderry and Dublin. Translink has advised that it is in contact with the City of Culture organisers and that the timetables of services provided jointly by Ulsterbus and Bus Éireann will be kept under review to take account of the programme of events planned.

It is open to the City of Culture organisers in order to meet the special transport requirements of participants and visitors to arrange private hire with properly licensed bus and coach operators, including Translink. It is also open to those operators to offer excursions or special services.

NI Water: Complaints

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how many complaints NI Water has received, in each of the last three years, in relation to (a) reminders for payments being received before the actual bill; (b) not receiving a bill until a number of weeks after it was dated; (c) intimidating final demand letters; and (e) customer service and communication; and (ii) for his assessment of these figures.

(AQW 8712/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that billing complaints are not recorded in the categories requested. A breakdown of related complaints is set out in the table below.

Complaint Regarding	No. of complaints 2009	No. of complaints 2010	No. of complaints 2011
Timing of reminders	7	4	N/A

Complaint Regarding	No. of complaints 2009	No. of complaints 2010	No. of complaints 2011
Delay in issuing the bill	27	15	16
Debt recovery procedure including the wording of the Final Notice	5	17	17
Bill or Final Notice not received	8	4	3
Debt recovery timetable	2	1	3
Poor information on the Bill/lack of information to customers	30	30	6

The categorisation of complaints has changed during this period so there is some variation in the profile.

NIW is striving to continually improve its service to customers. A review of billing complaints is underway within NIW to identify any weaknesses in the procedures and to develop measures that will ensure that accurate and timely billing information is provided to customers. While NIW considers every complaint important, the number of complaints received should be seen in the context of 170,000 bills issued each year.

Roads: Hollywood

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how much has been spent on roads in the Hollywood area in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8755/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Road Service has advised that it does not maintain an analysis of its expenditure for specific areas within a Council boundary. However, the table below details the maintenance expenditure over the last five financial years for the North Down Borough Council area:

NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL AREA – TOTAL MAINTENANCE EXPENDITURE

2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
£5,556,000	£5,744,000	£4,180,000	£4,304,000	£4,252,000

Roads Service has also carried out other work in the North Down area, including minor works schemes, bridge maintenance and traffic management schemes. However, as a breakdown of this work by Council area is not readily available, I would refer you to previous Council reports, which provide details of the work completed on roads in the North Down Borough Council Area. These reports can be accessed from my Department's internet site at the following web address:

http://www.drndi.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information/cinformationtype-results.htm?signpost=Customer+information&informationType=Roads+Service+reports+to+councils

Trade Union: Funding

Mr McCallister asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the level of funding his Department allocated to each trade union in the (i) 2000/01; (ii) 2005/06; and (iii) 2010/11 financial years.

(AQW 8765/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department provides funding to the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) for a number of full-time officials and support staff seconded from the Department.

During each of the years in question, the total salary costs met by DRD in respect of these seconded staff were as follows:

Year	2000/01	2005/06	2010/11
Salary Costs £	160,742	200,460	172,975

NSL Services Group: Funding

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development what action he intends to take to address the differential between the amount paid to NSL Services Group for the parking enforcement and car park management contract and the level of revenue generated.

(AQW 8771/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Member is aware that the costs associated with the provision of parking services and parking enforcement, including contract payments to NSL Services Group, exceed parking income and the deficit is funded by my Department.

I would point out that the primary aim of parking enforcement is to encourage drivers to park properly. If all drivers adhere to parking regulations, then income from Penalty Charge Notices would reduce and the overall deficit would increase. However, the non-financial benefits of having fewer illegally parked cars on our streets include less congestion, more available parking spaces in town centres and improved safety. My Department is of the opinion that these benefits are essential to the vitality of towns and cities and it is therefore important that effective enforcement continues to be provided.

My Department will continue to monitor the cost of providing parking services and parking enforcement and strive to keep this to a minimum, while also looking at ways of increasing revenue to minimise the deficit.

SmartPass

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) how Translink is reimbursed for the cost of fares for holders of 60+ travelcards; (ii) whether holders can only purchase single fares; and if so, (iii) whether his Department is paying a higher rate to Translink, given that single fares are more expensive than return fares.

(AQW 8834/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In response to your questions on reimbursement for 60+ travelcard users I would advise that:-

- (i) Those aged above 60 who are permanent residents of Northern Ireland are eligible for a travelcard entitling them to free travel on stage carriage services throughout Northern Ireland.

The 60 Plus travel card is a SmartPass which means that each journey is electronically recorded and that the Department only reimburses Translink on the basis of actual journeys in line with audit recommendations. In reimbursing Translink, the Department also takes account of the increased patronage generated by free travel. The reimbursement of Translink and the small private operators on the concessionary fare scheme is audited on an annual basis by independent auditors appointed by the Department.

- (ii) Sixty Plus SmartPasses can only be used to obtain single tickets this minimises the risk of fraudulent usage given current systems infrastructure.
- (iii) The policy on the issuing of single tickets seeks to minimise the risk of fraud and wastage in circumstances where the individual obtaining the ticket is not making a financial contribution.

Travel concessions funded under the Northern Ireland Concessionary Fares Scheme and discounts offered commercially by Translink are separate issues. Transport operators offer discounted ticket products to encourage commercial customers to make additional journeys on public transport services to stimulate revenue and passenger journey growth. The main purpose of SmartPasses is to help ensure social inclusion. The overall level of grant support or reimbursement to Translink, from any source, will ultimately impact on fare levels and service provision.

A28: Overtaking Lane

Mr Irwin asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to address the concerns of motorists travelling from Newry to Armagh along the A28, regarding the lack of an overtaking lane leaving Newry, and the problem this presents for drivers when heavy goods vehicles or other slow moving vehicles restrict the free flow of traffic.

(AQW 8842/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member that when the Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan 2015 was being compiled, the provision of widened carriageway schemes was considered for the A28 Newry - Armagh Road, including a northbound overtaking opportunity north of Newry. However, in the intervening period, design standards have been revised and it is no longer recommended that widened carriageway schemes are provided where there are a significant number of minor road junctions and accesses. Consequently, there are currently no plans to providing dedicated overtaking opportunities north of Newry.

However, you will be aware that a southbound Climbing Lane is currently under construction at Edenaveys on the A28, which does meet the particular design requirements. It is anticipated that work, which will cost £3.3m, will be completed this Spring.

Trade Union: Secondment

Mr McCallister asked Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the number of (a) full-time; and (b) part-time staff who are currently on secondment from his Department, or its arm's length bodies, to each recognised trade union; (ii) the salary scale for each secondee; and (iii) the length of each secondment to date.

(AQW 8855/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Five full-time staff from my Department and one full-time member of staff from Northern Ireland Water (NIW) are currently seconded to the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA). In addition, two full-time NIW staff are currently on secondment to UNITE.

Details for each of the secondees concerned are set out in the table below.

Seconded From	Seconded To	Period of Secondment (to nearest month)	Current Salary Range £
DRD	NIPSA	5 years and 6 months	34,163 - 38,893
DRD	NIPSA	6 years	21,392 - 23,250
DRD	NIPSA	7 years and 5 months	18,038 - 22,180
DRD	NIPSA	12 years and 3 months	27,115 - 30,520
DRD	NIPSA	5 years and 4 months	27,115 - 30,520
NIW	UNITE	6 years and 11 months	20,107 - 24,516
NIW	UNITE	6 years and 11 months	20,107 - 24,516
NIW	NIPSA	6 years and 11 months	15,038 - 18,380

No part-time staff from my Department or its Arm's Length Bodies are currently seconded to trade unions.

Unadopted Roads: Financial Relief

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister for Regional Development what financial relief will be provided to residents who live in private residential estates where the roads, water and sewage facilities and street lighting provision have not been brought up to an adoptable standard.

(AQW 8860/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has no legislative authority to use public funds for the provision of financial relief to residents, who live in private residential estates where the roads, water and sewage facilities and street lighting provision have not yet been brought up to an adoptable standard.

My Department will, however, continue to discharge its responsibilities relating to the determination and adoption of new residential streets, sewage facilities and street lighting in line with current legislation. This will include appropriate enforcement action and use of bond monies to complete street works, where developers have failed to complete.

Northern Ireland Water (NIW) has similarly advised that it has no mechanism whereby funding can be made available to residents in developments where sewerage systems have not yet been adopted. However, it will seek to work with residents, developers and their successors, assignees and administrators to advise on the options available. This will ensure sewers are brought up to an adoptable standard and that enforcement measures utilising the bond security will be applied, where applicable.

I should also advise that as all water mains within developments are laid by NIW, they are therefore owned and maintained by NIW as part of the public water supply system.

The Member will also be aware that the Committee for Regional Development is conducting an Inquiry into unadopted roads, and a formal consultation period is currently under way.

Translink: Redundancies

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development whether Translink had any contact with stakeholder groups, including rail users groups, Disability Action, local councils, and the UK City of Culture 2013 Committee before embarking on staffing reductions on the north-west rail route; and to outline the reasons for Translink's position on this issue.

(AQW 8873/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Staffing levels are an operational matter for Translink and consultation with outside agencies/bodies such as those referred to, would not be normal practice. You will appreciate Translink is required to operate commercially within the current difficult economic environment. It is essential that they continue to operate efficiently to ensure fare levels are kept to a minimum, service provision is protected as far as possible, staff wage and pension costs can be afforded and staffing is kept at levels which maintain a safe and efficient service. To date small reductions in staff numbers have been managed by voluntary redundancy or by redeployment. I am assured by Translink that this will continue to be the situation.

Translink: DDA Compliance

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development, in light of the investment by Translink in new facilities at stations on the north-west rail link, for his assessment of how they will be utilised given the restricted opening hours resulting from staff reductions on the route.

(AQW 8874/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has advised that stations and halts on the north-west corridor were included as part of a network-wide programme to achieve Disability Discrimination Act compliance at public transport facilities. Measures included re-surfacing of platforms to provide tactile paving, adapted toilet facilities, lowered counter heights at customer service interfaces and improved lighting. This was, by necessity, a rolling programme which took several years and which concluded in 2009.

Other infrastructure projects either in hand or planned for rail stations in this area include:

- Canopy and station building cladding at Ballymena
- Footbridge at Ballymoney
- Repair to canopy at Coleraine
- CCTV renewal at Londonderry (as part of a network-wide programme)
- Refurbishment of existing platform canopy at Portrush, power-washing and repainting

Translink is of the view that these projects are aligned to its aim of providing optimum standard in facilities for their customers and does not consider that either the staff changes or the change in opening hours referred to will adversely impact on the use of its services and facilities.

North-west Rail Link: Staffing

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development whether Translink has provided his Department with a breakdown of the increased costs that will be incurred as a result of their staffing restructuring on the north-west rail link.

(AQW 8875/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Staffing levels are an operational matter for Translink who have advised me that the staff restructuring on this rail corridor involved voluntary redundancies. This will result in efficiency savings as there will be less expenditure on staff costs.

As advised previously in response to AQW 8670/11-15, any costs for additional security provision at Londonderry Railway Station are not related to recent reduction in staffing levels.

Translink: Managerial Appointments

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development why there is an ongoing increase in managerial appointments in Translink at a time when customer care or operational staff numbers are being reduced.

(AQW 8876/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Staffing levels are an operational matter for Translink who have advised me that since the start of the financial year, 1 April 2011 to 2 March 2012, there has been no increase to the managerial headcount.

Plugged-in Places Scheme

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development to list the locations of the 'Plugged-In Places' charging points for electric cars.

(AQW 8911/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Northern Ireland 'Plugged In Places' scheme is a joint initiative with the Department of the Environment and a range of Consortium Partners. The scheme aims to pilot electric vehicle infrastructure in 6 Council locations across Northern Ireland in 2011/12, with further expansion to new Council areas across the region in 2012/13.

The Project will see 41 standard charge points and 4 rapid charge points installed in Belfast City Council, Newry and Mourne District Council, Derry City Council, Fermanagh District Council, Armagh District Council and Larne Borough Council areas by 31st of March 2012.

A full list of the Year 1 Charge Point locations is outlined below;

No.	Region	Location
Standard Chargers		
1	Belfast	Little Victoria Street Car Park, Belfast
2	Belfast	Corporation Square Car Park, Belfast
3	Belfast	Little Donegall Street, Belfast
4	Belfast	Cromac Street Car Park, Belfast
5	Belfast	Hope Street North, Belfast
6	Belfast	Adelaide Street on street parking, Belfast

No.	Region	Location
7	Belfast	Dublin Road on street parking, Belfast
8	Belfast	Lower Crescent on street parking, Belfast
9	Belfast	Bloomfield Shopping Centre, Bangor
10	Belfast	Central Station car park, Belfast
11	Belfast	Cairns Hill Park and Ride, Belfast
12	Armagh	Linenhall Street Roads Service car park, Armagh
13	Armagh	Lonsdale Street Roads Service car park, Armagh
14	Armagh	Armagh Leisure Centre
15	Armagh	Palace Demense, Armagh
16	Newry	Bagenals Castle, Newry
17	Newry	Bridge Street car park, Newry
18	Newry	Basin Walk car park, Newry
19	Newry	Monaghan Street car park, Newry
20	Newry	Hill Street on street parking, Newry
21	Newry	Canal Court Newry
22	Newry	Newry Train station, Newry
23	Londonderry	Victoria Market car park, Londonderry
24	Londonderry	Bishop Street car park, Londonderry
25	Londonderry	Railway Yard, Londonderry
26	Londonderry	Strand Road, Londonderry
27	Londonderry	Carlisle Road on street, Londonderry
28	Londonderry	The Diamond on street, Londonderry
29	Londonderry	Templemore Leisure Centre, Londonderry
30	Fermanagh	Down/Market/Cross Street, Enniskillen
31	Fermanagh	Eden Street, Enniskillen
32	Fermanagh	Quay Lane North, Enniskillen
33	Fermanagh	Wellington Street, Enniskillen
34	Fermanagh	Queen St, DRD Carpark, Enniskillen
35	Fermanagh	Cross Street, DRD Carpark, Lisnaskea
36	Fermanagh	Main Street, Irvinestown - DRD
37	Fermanagh	Main Street, Belleek - DRD
38	Larne	Narrow Gauge Road, Larne
39	Larne	Agnew Street, Larne
40	Larne	Riverdale, Larne

No.	Region	Location
41	Larne	Carnlough, Havelock Place
Rapid Chargers		
1	Dungannon	M1, Junction 15, Donnelly Group Garage
2	Magherafelt	M2, Glenshane Pass, Jamsies Garage
3	Lisburn	A1, Garage
4	Newry	A1, Newry, 24 Hour Garage

During 2012/13 the project will aim to install a further 100 charge points across Northern Ireland. This will include expansion to include other Council areas outside the initial locations. The ecar Project team are currently identifying and finalising locations for installation during 2012/13.

Traffic Weight Restriction Order

Mrs Hale asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the criteria used to assess the need for a Traffic Weight Restriction Order in a residential area.

(AQW 8961/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that when considering the need for a weight restriction on a road, it will primarily take into account the condition of the road. Other factors considered include road geometry, gradient, and traffic volumes, including the percentage of heavy vehicles.

However, weight restrictions are used very sparingly as they would apply to all vehicles in excess of the specified Gross Vehicle Weight and can have an adverse effect on other road users, including delivery vehicles, which need to use the road in question for access to premises.

A26: Travel Time

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what the estimated reduction in average travel time from Belfast to Ballycastle would be if the proposed work on the A26 from Glarryford to the Drones Road junction was carried out.

(AQW 9008/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As part of the design process for the proposed A26 dualling between Glarryford and the A44 Drones Road junction, Roads Service has undertaken studies to estimate the journey time savings over this length of carriageway. These modelled journey time savings, after upgrading this seven kilometre length of single carriageway to dual carriageway, are detailed in the table below:

Northbound		Southbound	
Time Period	Saving	Time Period	Saving
Am peak	1 min 31 seconds	Am peak	3 min 16 seconds
interpeak	1 min 32 seconds	interpeak	1 min 33 seconds
Pm peak	4 min 31 seconds	Pm peak	1 min 51 seconds

Ferry Service: Ballycastle to Rathlin Island

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Regional Development when his Department was informed of the MV Canna's withdrawal from service.

(AQW 9031/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The operator of the Ballycastle to Rathlin Island ferry informed my Department on 1 March 2012 that the MV Canna would be taken off service for essential engine maintenance. The ferry was taken off service on 5 March, on the same date that a temporary replacement vessel was brought into operation.

Ferry Service: Ballycastle to Rathlin Island

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Regional Development when his Department was made aware that Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited had appealed against the Lloyd's Register of the MV Canna.
(AQW 9032/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department was informed by Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited on 27 October 2011 that it had formally lodged an appeal with Lloyd's Register requesting a review of the granting of classification for the MV Canna.

Ferry Service: Ballycastle to Rathlin Island

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Regional Development when his Department was first informed that the required engine overhaul of the MV Canna had not taken place.
(AQW 9033/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Department was notified by Rathlin Island Ferry Ltd on 1 February 2012 that an overhaul of the MV Canna's engines was required. On 5 March 2012 the MV Canna left Ballycastle for dry dock for this work to be undertaken.

Ferry Service: Ballycastle to Rathlin Island

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Regional Development whether the terms of the contract held by Rathlin Island Ferry Ltd have been breached, either in terms of the failure to provide the ferry service or the failure to submit the company accounts by the required date.
(AQW 9034/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Rathlin Island Ferry Limited has not breached its terms of contract with my Department.

Traffic Weight Restriction Order

Mrs Hale asked the Minister for Regional Development to list the locations where traffic weight restrictions are in force; and the reasons why each restriction is in place.
(AQW 9038/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of locations where traffic weight restrictions are in force, in respect of roads, are listed below. The roads are listed under the appropriate weight restriction at each location identified, with restrictions having been put in place by means of an Order under Article 4 of the Roads Traffic (NI) Order 1997.

I can advise the Member that the reason for the restriction is not stated in the legislation and given that many of the restrictions have been in place for a considerable number of years and in some cases decades, this information is not readily available. However, the Member will be aware from my answer to her Assembly Question AQW 8961/11-15, of the factors that my Department's Roads Service considers when determining whether a weight restriction is necessary at any particular location to protect the underlying road.

WEIGHT RESTRICTIONS

2 Tonnes Maximum Gross Weight

- Dogleap Road, Limavady, carried by the Largy Bridge over the River Roe.

3 Tonnes Maximum Gross Weight

- Church Road, Armoy, from its junction with Main Street, to its junction with Gracehill Road, Route B15.
- Shore Road, Unclassified No. 2017, in the townlands of Ballyvanen and Ballyvorally, County Antrim, from its junction with Darachrean Road, Unclassified No. 49, to its junction with Ingram's Road, Unclassified No. 49.
- Ingram's Road, Unclassified No. 49, in the townland of Ballyvorally, County Antrim.
- Shell Road, Unclassified No. 125, Campsie, County Londonderry.
- Gortscreagan Road, Unclassified No. 181, Claudy, from its junction with Slieveboy Road, Route C512, to its junction with Carnanreagh Road, Route C511.
- Torr Road, Route C82, Cushendun and Ballycastle, from its junction with Bay Road, Cushendun, to its junction with Murlough Road, Unclassified No. 88, Ballycastle.
- Groganstown Road, Unclassified No. 26, Groganstown, Dunmurry, County Antrim, from its junction with Colinglen Road, Route A501, to a point 350 metres north-east of that junction.
- Ardrough Road, Route C503, Londonderry, from its junction with Carmoney Road, Unclassified No. 131, to its junction with Old Drumahoe Road, Route C503.
- Bonds Glen Road, Route C514, Londonderry, from its junction with Ardground Road, Route C508, to its junction with Longlands Road, Route B49.
- Chapel Road, Londonderry, from its junction with Spencer Road, to its junction with Fountain Hill.
- Corrody Road, Unclassified No. 155, Londonderry, from its junction with Woodside Road, to its junction with Kittybane Road.
- Fountain Hill, Londonderry, from its junction with Spencer Road, to its junction with Chapel Road.
- Moore Street, Londonderry.
- Rosstown Road, Unclassified No. 120, Londonderry, from its junction with Ardrough Road, Route C503, to its junction with Crescent Link, Route A514.
- Woodside Road, Unclassified No. 155, Londonderry, from its junction with Bards Hill, to a point 645 metres south of its junction with Corrody Road.
- Temple Road, Route C568, in the townlands of Templetown and Maydown, County Londonderry, from its junction with Clooney Road, Route A2, to a point 850 metres north-east of that junction.
- Ballysillan Park, Belfast, while travelling in a south-easterly direction.

3.5 Tonnes Maximum Gross Weight

- North-eastbound carriageway of Church Place, Route A3, Lurgan, between the War Memorial and Shankill Parish Church

5 Tonnes Maximum Gross Weight

- Hammond Road, Unclassified No. 2062, in the townlands of Aghadavy, Magheramesk and Maghaberry, County Antrim.
- Craneystown Road, Unclassified No. 72, in the townlands of Ballycarrickmaddy and Ballymave, County Antrim.
- Hungry House Lane, Unclassified No. 72, in the townlands of Ballycarrickmaddy and Ballynadolly, County Antrim.
- Horse Park Road, Unclassified No. 70, in the townland of Ballyellough, County Antrim.
- Kilcorrig Road, Unclassified No. 70, in the townlands of Ballyellough, Magheragall and Kilcorrig, County Antrim.

- Flowbog Road, Unclassified No. 23, in the townlands of Ballymacward Upper and Slievenacloy, County Antrim, from its junction with Rock Road, Route B101, to a point 69 metres north-west of its junction with Ballycollin Road, Unclassified No. 23.
- School Lane, Unclassified No. 72, in the townlands of Ballymave, Ballyellough and Ballycarrickmaddy, County Antrim.
- Ballyrainey Road, Route C266, Comber.
- Filterbeds Road, Unclassified No. 78, in the townland of Derrykillultagh, County Antrim.
- Porters Bridge Road, Unclassified No. 78, in the townland of Derrykillultagh, County Antrim.
- Shore Road, Unclassified No. 2017, in the townlands of Feumore and Ballyvanen, County Antrim, from its junction with Lough Road, Unclassified No. 49, to its junction with Feumore Road.
- Whinney Hill, Unclassified No. 70, in the townlands of Kilcorrig, Ballyclogh and Ballynadolly, County Antrim.
- Lagmore Road, Unclassified No. 100, in the townland of Lagmore, County Antrim, from its junction with Colinglen Road, Route A501, to a point 190 metres west of its junction with Stewartstown Road, Route B102.
- Park Road, Newtownabbey, from its junction with Mallusk Road, to its junction with Antrim Road.
- Glenleary Road, Unclassified No. 3340, Coleraine, from its junction with Castleroe Road, to its junction with Coolyvenny Road.
- Hillhead Road, Unclassified No. 5285, Newry.
- Corcreechy Road, Unclassified No. 6062, Newry, from its junction with Corcreechy Road, Route C340, to its junction with Turmore Road, Route C339.
- Ballybarnes Road, Unclassified No. 104, Newtownards, from a point 800 metres north-east of its junction with Belfast Road, Route C263, to its junction with Ballysallagh Road, Route B170.

7.5 Tonnes Maximum Gross Weight

- Boghead Bridge Road, Unclassified No. 1002, Aghalee.
- Brankins Island Road, Unclassified No. 1011, Aghalee.
- Diamond Lane, Unclassified No. 1005, Aghalee.
- Feather Bed Road, Unclassified No. 1024, Aghalee.
- Grants Lane, Unclassified No. 1023, Aghalee.
- Montiaghs Road, Unclassified No. 1024, Aghalee.
- Moss Lane, Unclassified No. 1003, Aghalee.
- Unnamed road, Unclassified No. 1004, Aghalee, linking Boghead Bridge Road, Unclassified No. 1002, and Brankinstown Road, Route C10.
- Birch Hill Road, Unclassified No. 1074, Antrim, from its junction with Crosskennan Road, Route C44, to its junction with Ballygore Road.
- Bush Road, Unclassified No. 1073, Antrim, from its junction with Crosskennan Road, Route C44, to its junction with Glenmullion Road, Unclassified No. 1072.
- Carnearney Lane, Unclassified No. 1067, Antrim, from its junction with Carnearney Road, Unclassified No. 1066, to its junction with Ladyhill Road, Unclassified No. 1065.
- Carnearney Road, Unclassified No. 1066, Antrim, from its junction with Ladyhill Road, Unclassified No. 1065, to its junction with Parkgate Road, Route C43.
- Chapeltown Road, Unclassified No. 1058, Antrim, from its junction with Steeple Road, Route C45, to its junction with Tavnaghmore Road, Unclassified No. 1056.

- Drumkeeran Road, Unclassified No. 1048, Antrim, from its junction with Oldwood Road, to its junction with Lisnevenagh Road, Route A26.
- Eskylane Road, Unclassified No. 1059, Antrim, from its junction with Kilgavanagh Road, Unclassified No. 1061, to its junction with Chapeltown Road, Unclassified No. 1058.
- Kilgavanagh Road, Unclassified No. 1057, Antrim.
- Kilgavanagh Road, Unclassified No. 1061, Antrim, from its southern extremity to its junctions with Kilgavanagh Road, Unclassified No. 1057, and Creevery Road, Unclassified No. 1060.
- Ladyhill Road, Unclassified No. 1065, Antrim, from its junction with Carnearney Road, Unclassified No. 1066, to its junction with Steeple Road, Route C45.
- Old Ballynoe Road, Unclassified No. 1068, Antrim, from its junction with Carnearney Lane, Unclassified No. 1068, to its junction with Crosskennan Lane, Unclassified No. 1069.
- Oldwood Road, Antrim, from its junction with Craigstown Road, Route B53, to its junction with Lisnevenagh Road, Route A26.
- Rough Lane, Unclassified No. 1071, Antrim.
- Thornhill Road, Unclassified No. 1057, Antrim, from its northern junction with Creevery Road, Unclassified No. 1060, to its junction with Fernisky Road, Route 53.
- Ballynulto Road East, Unclassified No. 2101, Ballymena, from its junction with Church Road, Route A36, to its junction with Rocavan Road, Route C65.
- Carniny Road, Unclassified No. 2026, Ballymena, from its junction with Tullygrawley Road, Route C57, to its junction with Teeshan Road, Unclassified No. 2027.
- Fenagh Road, Unclassified No. 2025, Ballymena, from its junction with Crankill Road, Route A26, to its junction with Tullygrawley Road, Route C57.
- Shillanavogy Road, Unclassified No. 2107, Ballymena, from its junction with Glenhead Road, Unclassified No. 2106, to its junction with Drumcrow Road, Unclassified No. 4015.
- Deroar Road, Unclassified No. 1738, Beragh, County Tyrone, from its junction with Dreenan Road, Unclassified No. 1737, to its junction with Bancran Road, Route C627.
- Dreenan Road, Unclassified No. 1737, Beragh, County Tyrone, from its junction with Spring Road, Route C628, to its junction with Bancran Road, Route C627.
- Athenree Lane, Unclassified No. 1733, Carrickmore, County Tyrone, from its junction with Quarry Road, Route C626, to its junction with Tiroony Road, Route B46.
- Curran Road, Route C558, Castledawson.
- Ardbarren Road, Unclassified No. 138, Castlederg, from its junction with Scraghy Road, Route B72, to its junction with Ardbarren Road, Route C672.
- Drumgallan Road, Unclassified No. 119, Castlederg, from its junction with Castlederg Road, Route B50, to its junction with Magheracreggan Road, Route C679.
- Tullymoan Road, Unclassified No. 202, Clady, County Tyrone, from its junction with Lisdoo Road, Unclassified No. 202, to its junction with Orchard Road, Route C677.
- Kilcronagh Road, Unclassified No. 829, Cookstown, from its junction with Pomeroy Road, Route B4, to its junction with Sandholes Road, Route C622.
- Ardmore Road, Unclassified No. 1145, Crumlin, from its junction with Largy Road, Route C22, to its junction with Diamond Road, Route C23.
- Ballyclan Road, Unclassified No. 1143, Crumlin, from its junction with Largy Road, Route C22, to its junction with Diamond Road, Route C23.
- Cidercourt Road, Unclassified No. 1140, Crumlin, from its junction with Largy Road, Route C22, to its junction with Cidercourt Road, Unclassified No. 1141.

- Cidercourt Road, Unclassified No. 1141, Crumlin.
- Loughview Road, Unclassified No. 1148, Crumlin, from its junction with Diamond Road, Route C23, to its junction with Dunore Road, Unclassified No. 1152.
- Dunnygarron Road, Unclassified No. 2024, Cullybackey, County Antrim, from its junction with Fenagh Road, Route C56, to its junction with Redford Road, Unclassified No. 2023.
- Bay Rampart, Unclassified No. 1065, Derryadd.
- Byrnes Rampart, Unclassified No. 1068, Derryadd.
- Church Road, Unclassified No. 1069, Derryadd.
- Hall Rampart, Unclassified No. 1064, Derryadd.
- Lenny's Road, Unclassified No. 1070, Derryadd.
- Pier Rampart, Unclassified No. 1067, Derryadd.
- Skeltons Rampart, Unclassified No. 1066, Derryadd.
- Unnamed road, Unclassified No. 1071, Derryadd, linking Pier Rampart, Unclassified No. 1067, and Byrnes Rampart, Unclassified No. 1068.
- The Palms, Unclassified No. 1149, Derrymacash.
- Cullion Road, Unclassified No. 5200, Desertmartin, from its junction with Drumard Road, Unclassified No. 5204, to its junction with Iniscarn Road, Route C555.
- Drumard Road, Unclassified No. 5204, Desertmartin, from its junction with Cahore Road, Unclassified No. 5206, to its junction with Cullion Road, Unclassified No. 5200.
- Altmore Drive, Unclassified No. 7516, Dungannon, from its junction with Carland Road, Route A29, to its junction with Oaks Road, Route A45.
- Teeavan Road, Unclassified No. 2404, Dungiven, from its junction with Glenshane Road, Route A6, to its junction with Teeavan Road, Unclassified No. 2403.
- Turmeel Road, Unclassified No. 2403, Dungiven.
- Dickeystown Road, Unclassified No. 4009, Glenarm, from its junction with Drumnagreagh Road, Route B148, to its junction with Feystown Road, Unclassified No. 4010.
- Carnduff Road, Unclassified No. 4050, Glynn, Larne, from its junction with Carrickfergus Road, Route C74, to its junction with Browndod Road, Route C73.
- Glenburn Road, Unclassified No. 4049, Glynn, Larne, from its junction with Shore Road, Route A2, to its junction with Carrickfergus Road, Route C74.
- Ballyfore Road, Unclassified No. 4045, Larne, from its junction with Ballyvallagh Road, Unclassified No. 4044, to its junction with Ballyrickard Road, Route B100.
- Casement's Brae, Larne.
- Lodge Road, Larne.
- Corran Road, Unclassified No. 8112, Markethill.
- Inisclan Road, Unclassified No. 1253, Mountfield, County Tyrone, from its southern junction with Lenagh Road, Route C612D, to a point 225 metres north-east of that junction.
- Boghill Road, Unclassified No. 1104, Newtownabbey, from its junction with Lylehill Road, Route C27, to its junction with Flush Road, Unclassified No. 1104.
- Cavankill Road, Unclassified No. 5172, Newtownhamilton.
- Cold Brae Road, Unclassified No. 5123, Newtownhamilton.
- Elders Road, Unclassified No. 5178, Newtownhamilton.

- Macullaghs Road, Unclassified No. 5173, Newtownhamilton.
- School Road, Unclassified No. 5096, Newtownhamilton.
- Viewpoint Road, Newtownhamilton.
- Largybeg Road, Route C679D, Newtownstewart, from its junction with Drumlegagh Church Road, Route C680, to its junction with Letterbin Road, Route C680B.
- Strahulter Road, Unclassified No. 1910, Newtownstewart, from its junction with Killymore Road, Route B46, to its junction with Strahulter Road, Route C613.
- Arleston Road, Unclassified No. 1701, Omagh.
- Glencam Road, Unclassified No. 1269, Omagh, from its junction with Gortin Road, Route B48, to its junction with Killybrack Road, Unclassified No. 1269.
- Clonavon Avenue, Portadown.
- Ballylurgan Road, Unclassified No. 1044, Randalstown.
- Ballylurgan Road, Unclassified No. 1050, Randalstown, from its junction with Connaught Road, Unclassified No. 1043, to its junction with Craigstown Road, Route B53.
- Greenan Road, Unclassified No. 1037, Randalstown, from its junction with Moneynick Road, Route A6, to its junction with Derrygowan Road, Route C52.
- Knockroe Road, Unclassified No. 209, Sion Mills, County Tyrone, from its junction with Melmount Road, Route A5, to its junction with Orchard Road, Route C677.
- Aughnabrack Road, Unclassified No. 1104, Templepatrick, from its junction with Lylehill Road, Route C27, to its junction with Flush Road, Unclassified No. 1104.
- Cloughanduff Road, Unclassified No. 1100, Templepatrick, from its junction with Antrim Road, Route A6, to its junction with Old Coach Road, Route B95.
- Flush Road, Unclassified No. 1104, Templepatrick, from its junction with Boghill Road, Unclassified No. 1104, to its junction with Ballyutoag Road, Route A52.
- Brecart Road, Unclassified No. 1005, Toomebridge.
- Creagh Road, Unclassified No. 5107, Toomebridge, from its junction with Blackpark Road, Unclassified No. 5106, to its junction with Castledawson By-Pass, Route A6.
- Crockroe Road, Unclassified No. 1647, Trillick, County Tyrone.
- Coolkill Road, Route B210, Tynan, County Armagh.
- Mound Road, Unclassified No. 6196, Warrenpoint.
- Rawbrae Road, Unclassified No. 3014, Whitehead.
- Moneycarrie Road, Route C543, Coleraine, from its junction with Mullaghinch Road, Route B207, to its junction with Ballygawley Road, Route B188.
- Ardreagh Road, Unclassified No. 361, Coleraine, from its junction with Greenhill Road, Route B66, to its junction with Drumcroon Road, Route A29.
- Ballymacrea Road, Unclassified No. 36, Portrush, from its junction with Ballybogey Road, Route B62, to a point 1300 metres south-west of that junction.
- Corbally Road, Route C96, Portrush, from its junction with Gateside Road, Route C93, to its junction with Ballyholme Road, Route C96.
- Grove Road, Route C545, Garvagh, from its junction with Carhill Road, Route A29, to its junction with Kurin Road, Route C545.
- Grove Road, Unclassified No. 378, Garvagh from its junction with Kurin Road, Route C545, to its junction with Edenbane Road, Route B64.

- Killeague Road, Route C539, Coleraine, from its junction with Cashel Road, Route B186 to its junction with Kinnyglass Road, Unclassified No. 338.
- Macleary Road, Unclassified No. 338, Coleraine, from its junction with Cashel Road, Route B186, to its junction with Killure Road, Unclassified No. 338.
- Killure Road, Unclassified No. 338, Coleraine, from its junction with Killeague Road, Route C539, to its junction with Drumcroon Road, Route A29.
- Dawson Street, Unclassified No. 7008, Armagh, from its junction with Edward Street, to its junction with Abbey Street, while travelling in a southerly direction.
- Dawson Street, Unclassified No. 7008, Armagh, from its junction with Edward Street, to its junction with Cathedral Road, while travelling in a northerly direction.
- Clooney Road, Route C558, Tobermore.
- Ballyheather Road, Route C602, Strabane, from its junction with Moyagh Road, Unclassified No. 1819, to its junction with Ballyheather Road, Route C602.
- Split Bog Road, Unclassified No. 4277, Moneyslane, from a point approximately 600 metres south-east of its junction with Closkelt Road, Unclassified No. 4276, to its junction with Moneyslane Road, Route B7.
- Island Road, Unclassified No. 82, Shankbridge, Ballymena.
- Tullynamullan Road, Unclassified No. 83, Shankbridge, Ballymena, from its junction with Maine Road, Route C48, to a point approximately 1,275 metres south-east of that junction.
- Bachelors Walk, Portadown.
- Pinehill Road, Unclassified No. 109, Ballymoney.
- Lisboy Road, Unclassified No. 110, Ballymoney, from its junction with Knockahollet Road, Route C86 to its junction with Kilraughts Road, Route B16.
- Loughabin Road, Unclassified No. 111, Ballymoney, from its junction with Knockahollet Road, Route C86, to its junction with Gortstagherty Road, Route C90.
- Old Frosses Road, Unclassified No. 173, Cloughmills and Dowgry Road, Route C60, Cloughmills.
- Canal Street, Route A27, Newry, and that part of Armagh Road, Route A27, Newry, between its junction with Barrack Street, and a point approximately 10 metres northwest of its junction with Plunkett Street.
- Beechmount Park, Unclassified Nos. 6293-16 and 6293-17, Newry.
- Elmwood Park, Unclassified No. 6293-14, Newry.
- Upper Damolly Road, Unclassified No. 6293-04, Newry, from its junction with
- Ashgrove Avenue, to its junction with Rathfriland Road.
- Millbay Road, Route B90, Islandmagee, County Antrim.
- McRory's Road, Unclassified No. 5071, Newtownhamilton.
- Manooney Road, Unclassified No. 8733, Killylea, County Armagh.
- Ballynahone Road, Route C557, Magherafelt, and Killyboggin Road, Unclassified No. 5172, Magherafelt, from its junction with Desertmartin Road, Route A29 to its junction with Lisalbanagh Road, Unclassified No. 5171.
- Killynamph Road, Unclassified No. 9446, Lisnaskea.
- Carn Road, Unclassified No. 127, Nutts Corner, Crumlin, from its junction with Belfast Road, Route A52, to its junction with Seven Mile Straight, Route B39.
- Umgall Road, Unclassified No. 104, Nutts Corner, Crumlin.

- Lisnabilla Road, Route C8, Moira.
- Killynamph Road, Unclassified No. 9446, Lisnaskea.
- Kensington Park, Unclassified No. 7027, Lisburn, County Antrim.
- Friary Road, Newtownhamilton, Route C204, from its junction with Clady Road, Route C204, to a point approximately 2392 metres south of that junction.
- Drennan's Road, Route C25, Crumlin.
- Davagh Road, Unclassified No. 1236, Greencastle, County Tyrone.
- Craighulliar Road, Unclassified No. 306, Portrush and Craighulliar Road, Unclassified No. 36, Portrush.
- Corramore Road, Unclassified No. 1974, Plumbridge, County Tyrone.
- Shinny Road, Unclassified No. U337, Coleraine, from its junction with Cashel Road, Route B186 to its junction with Cam Road and Letterloan Road Route C540.
- Ballinteer Road, Unclassified No. 336, Coleraine, from its junction with Farranseer Park Macosquin, to its junction with Windyhill Road, Route B201.
- Ballystrone Road, Unclassified No. 326, Coleraine.
- Isle Road, Unclassified No. 325, Coleraine.
- Ringrash Road, Route C534, Coleraine, from its junction with Ramsey Park Macosquin, to its junction with Windyhill Road, B201.
- Cullyrammer Road, Unclassified No. 368, Kilrea, from its junction with Mullaghinch Road, Route B188, to a point approximately 650 metres north of its junction with Killyvally Road, Unclassified No. 369.
- Cam Road, Unclassified No. 127, Nutts Corner, Crumlin, from its junction with Belfast Road, Route A52, to its junction with Seven Mile Straight, Route B39.
- Umgall Road, Unclassified No. 104, Nutts Corner, Crumlin.
- British Road, Aldergrove, Crumlin, County Antrim, from its junction with Dungonnell Road, for a distance of approximately 2,500 metres in an easterly direction.
- Bog Road, Unclassified No. 5412, Forkhill, between its junction with Sheen Road, Route C224, and a point approximately 1,050 metres north of that junction.
- Barnaghs Road, Unclassified No. 1725, Carrickmore, County Tyrone, between its junction with Gleneeny Road, Unclassified No. 1725, and its junction with Reclaim Road, Unclassified No. 903.
- The north-western carriageway of Bridge Street, Banbridge, from its junction with Scarva Street, to a point 96 metres north-east of that junction.
- The south-eastern carriageway of Bridge Street, Banbridge, from a point 99 metres north-east of its junction with Rathfriland Street, to that junction.
- The north-western carriageway of Newry Street, Banbridge, from a point 75 metres south-west of its junction with Scarva Street, to that junction.
- The south-eastern carriageway of Newry Street, Banbridge, from its junction with Rathfriland Street, to a point 72 metres south-west of that junction.
- Ballydonaghy Road, Route C20, Crumlin, from its junction with Moira Road, Route A26, to its junction with Dundrod Road, Route B101.
- Ballycowan Road, Unclassified No. 2079, Ballymena from its junction with Lisnevenagh Road, Route A26, to its junction with Liminary Road, Route C46.

16.5 Tonnes Maximum Gross Weight

- Rallagh Road, Unclassified No. 2401, Dungiven.
- Teeavan Road, Unclassified No. 2403, Dungiven, from its junction with Magheramore Road, Route C523, to its junction with Teevan Road, Unclassified No. 2404.
- Printshop Road, Nutts Corner, Crumlin, County Antrim.
- Long Rig Road, Route C26, Nutts Corner, Crumlin.

Roads Service similarly prohibits or restricts use of vehicles on certain road bridges. This is done by means of signs where Roads Service it is satisfied that the bridge is insufficient to bear vehicles exceeding certain weight limits.

The location of the bridges is provided by Council area and the bridge structure name in the table below. Details of the weight restriction in place are also provided for each bridge.

Council Area	Bridge/Structure Name	Location	Weight Restricted Tonnes
Ballymena Council	Ballycowan	Ballycowan, Ballymena.	7.50
	Legagrane	Skerry East Road, Ballymena.	2.50
Magherafelt Council	Newbridge Old	Airfield Road.	7.50
	No Name	Bridge Street.	18.00
Antrim Council	Tavnaghmore	Chapelstown Road, Kells.	5.00
Coleraine Council	Glasgort	Glasgort Road, Ballymoney.	7.50
Londonderry Council	The Crooked Bridge	Barnes Road.	3.00
	Kilgort	Gortscreagan Road.	3.00
Limavady Council	Owenbeg 2	Foreglen Road.	7.50
	Largy	Dog Leap Road.	2.00
Moyle Council	Armoy	Church Road	2.00
	East Torr 1	Farranmacallan Road	3.00
Craigavon Council	Fishponds Bridge	Tamnamore Road, Dungannon	18.00
	Douglas Bridge	Cullnagrew Road, Dungannon.	7.50
	Featherbed Rd., Br.	Featherbed Road, Derryhirk, Aghagallon.	17.00
Armagh Council	Metal Bridge	Porthill Road, Mowhan Armagh.	3.00
	Fergy's Bridge	Cusher-Gosford Road, Derryeughan Markethill.	7.50
	Mill Race Br.	Ballynagallagh Road, Tassagh	3.00
	Ballynagallagh Rd. Br.	Ballynagallagh Road, Tassagh	3.00
	Kilmacanty Rd. Br.	Kilmacanty Rd., Br., Kilmore, Loughgall	3.00
	B'macawley-Foley Rd. Br.	Ballymacawley-Foley Road, Tullynagin.	3.00

Council Area	Bridge/Structure Name	Location	Weight Restricted Tonnes
Newry & Mourne Council	Skerriff's Br.	Skerriff Road, Cullyhanna.	3.00
	Kilnasaggart Rd. Br.	Kilnasaggart Road, Jonesborough.	3.00
Belfast City Council	Summerhill Ave	Summerhill Avenue.	17.00
	Kings Bridge	Sunnyside Street	7.50
	Ladas Way/Loop River	Ladas Way	17.00
	Knockvale Grove	Knockvale Grove.	17.00
Omagh Council	King James Bridge	Irishtown Road, Omagh.	7.50
Strabane Council	Newtownstewart Br.		7.50
	Mullyfabeg Bridge	Tullycar Road, Castlederg.	7.50
	Abercorn Bridge		3.00
Fermanagh Council	Rosscor Viaduct		7.50
Dungannon Council	Oona Bridge	Drumflugh Road, Benburb.	7.50
	Bonds Bridge		7.50
Down Council	Kilmore Bridge	Kilmore Road, Kilmore.	10.00

Road Signs: Hillsborough

Mrs Hale asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration his Department has given to introducing road signs demarcating Hillsborough village as a conservation area.

(AQW 9089/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board have developed a protocol for tourist signing. While this protocol does not specifically identify Conservation Areas for additional signing, it does facilitate the erection of town and village nameplate signing, with the local Council taking a prominent/lead role in seeking such signage.

Roads Service has no record of having been asked to provide such signing for Hillsborough and has, therefore, not given the matter any consideration.

Water Leakage

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department is taking, in conjunction with NI Water, to tackle water leakage.

(AQO 1493/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The current priorities for water are set out in Social and Environmental Guidance. The Guidance was agreed by the Executive in April 2010. The key aim on leakage is for Northern Ireland Water (NI Water) to achieve the 'Economic Level of Leakage'. This is the level at which it would cost more to reduce leaks than to produce additional water. The economic level is the recognised industry standard throughout the United Kingdom.

NI Water has achieved significant reductions in the level of leakage in recent years through leakage management, upgrading water infrastructure and targeting resources to detect and repair leaks. NI Water is currently on course to meet the 2011/12 target of 171 megalitres per day as set by the Utility Regulator. It aims to further reduce leakage to a level of 168 megalitres per day by the end of March 2013.

The Executive is providing over £600 million for investment during the Budget period to enable NIW to reduce leakage and make other improvements to our infrastructure.

Alleys and Pathways: Unadopted

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department is taking to resolve the problem of unadopted alleys and pathways.

(AQO 1491/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the adoption of a private street, including a pathway or alley, is governed by Article 9 of the Private Streets (NI) Order 1980.

Under the Order, a street may be considered for adoption where:

- the majority of the owners and/or frontagers so request it;
- the Department is of the opinion that the street, or part of the street, should become a public road; and
- the street is first brought up to the required standard at the expense of the owners and/or frontagers.

The Member will appreciate that there are a large number of unadopted roads and private pathways in Northern Ireland and to agree to bring a particular unadopted pathway up to adoption standards would set an unacceptable precedent.

Cyclists: Safety

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister for Regional Development what discussions he has had with the Minister of the Environment regarding road safety for cyclists.

(AQO 1499/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have met with Minister Attwood on two occasions. In our meeting on 17 August 2011 we discussed speed limits and the road safety strategy. Our meeting on 15 December 2011 was held as part of the Ministerial Road Safety Group.

The specific issue of road safety for cyclists was not discussed at these meetings. The focus was more on the protection of all vulnerable road users including pedestrians, children, the elderly and, of course, cyclists.

One of the results of the meetings is that my officials are co-operating with DOE officials in preparing a publication to provide advice on safe cycling.

NI Water: Governance and Accountability

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the governance and accountability mechanism between his Department and Northern Ireland Water.

(AQO 1500/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Northern Ireland Water was established to be a regulated utility company operating at arms length from government control. DRD is the sole shareholder in the company. However, the continued majority government funding of NI Water has resulted in the reclassification of NI Water as an NDPB for public expenditure purposes.

This has led to complex and overlapping governance arrangements. Following recommendations by the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), my Department is taking forward the development of a Management Statement/Financial Memorandum in conjunction with DFP and I am considering the options for wider governance changes.

Public Transport: Investment

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps he will take to rebalance investment by his Department on public transport.

(AQO 1501/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am continually reviewing how to prioritise investment across my Department and indeed, recently allocated an additional £22 million to Translink from the roads budget to fund phase one of the Londonderry to Coleraine railway relay.

The strategy for the development of the transport system in Northern Ireland is framed in the Regional Development Strategy and developed in the Regional Transport Strategy. The current Transport strategy has been reviewed and a new approach is proposed. At its core is a move towards greater sustainability which will contribute positively to growing the economy while improving the quality of life for all and reducing the transport impacts on the economy.

There has been major investment in projects aimed at improving the railways network in Northern Ireland over the past few years and that has helped rebalance investment in public transport. Some key infrastructure projects are currently being taken forward by my Department including some £150 million which is being invested in the New Trains Programme and £47 million on the first two phases of the Londonderry to Coleraine railway track upgrade.

In considering an effective balance between roads investment and investment in other forms of transport I think it is important to recognise that the vast majority of public transport users avail of the bus services travelling via the roads network. In this context investment in roads benefits many users of public transport.

I will continue to review my Department's investment priorities to ensure that resources are used most effectively in delivering the services for which we are responsible.

Flags and Emblems: Protocol

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the current flags protocol. **(AQO 1502/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy: My Department does not approve of, or support, the unauthorised use of departmental property for any purpose, however, as the Member will appreciate, the removal of sectarian motivated signs and emblems, including flags, is a matter that needs to be treated with sensitivity. The Department also has to take into account the safety of those who are asked to undertake the removal. The risk of escalating the problem also needs to be taken into consideration.

The Department has signed up to the multi-agency Protocol on the Display of Flags in Public Areas, which was introduced in April 2005. Under the Protocol, my Department's Roads Service will, when called upon by the lead Agency, provide the access equipment and resources to assist in the removal of unwanted flags, once agreement has been reached with the local community.

Unauthorised memorials on the property of the Department's arms-length bodies are matters for the Boards of those organisations, bearing in mind their responsibilities for safety and statutory obligations to promote good relations between people of different religious beliefs or political persuasions.

While the current protocol has been helpful, I welcome its review, which is being led by OFMDFM and is currently ongoing. Roads Service will, of course, be participating in the review.

Department for Social Development

Postage and Printing Costs

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department, and its arm's-length bodies, give elected representatives the choice of receiving reports and all other correspondence by email to minimise postage and printing costs.

(AQW 8427/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): My Department will provide electronic responses to correspondence from Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) when requested by them to do so. MLAs are normally advised of the publication of reports by my Department and its arm's-length bodies by means of a letter of notification which will allow them to access the publication on the relevant website. Communication in relation to Ministerial Statements is carried out in accordance with the requirements of Assembly Standing Orders which require written copies of oral Statements to be made available to each MLA.

Economy 7 Heating

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 7584/11-15, to detail the specific plans each Housing Association has to replace Economy 7 and solid fuel heating systems.

(AQW 8555/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My department does not routinely collect this information and I understand that Housing Associations' plans to replace Economy 7 and solid fuel heating systems vary. However, the table below details the information that each Housing Association has provided to my department in relation to replacing their existing systems.

Alpha	Alpha Housing Association currently has 409 units with Economy 7 and has no Solid Fuel heating systems. Most stock comprises sheltered apartments and until a gas supply is made available, Economy 7 will remain the most suitable heating. However, they aim to convert 57 units to gas in 2012/13.
Apex	Apex Housing Association currently has 88 units with Economy 7. They aim to complete conversions to gas, where it is available, over the next two financial years - 50 units in 2012 and 28 units in 2013. The remaining 10 units in Fermanagh are in a privately owned scheme leased by Apex and the owner has no immediate plans to change heating though Apex are in ongoing discussions with the owner.
Ark	Ark Housing Association currently has no units with Solid Fuel heating. They currently have 84 units with Economy 7 within two sheltered schemes and a family centre. While they have no immediate plans to replace Economy 7 in the sheltered schemes, they aim to replace Economy 7 to gas in the Family Homeless Scheme when funding becomes available.
Filor	Filor Housing Association currently has 44 units with Economy 7 and has no Solid Fuel heating systems. They plan to convert six Economy 7 systems to gas in 2012/13.
Flax	Flax Housing Association currently has 38 units with Economy 7 and has no Solid Fuel heating systems. It aims to upgrade all to gas, where it is available, by end of March 2012
Fold	Fold Housing currently has 266 units with Economy 7 and six with Solid Fuel Heating systems. It aims to convert Economy 7 to gas, where it is available, as follows: 46 units in 2012/13; 49 units in 2013/14; 45 units in 2014/15; 59 units in 2015/16 and 67 units in 2016/17. The six Solid Fuel heating systems will be replaced by gas, where it is available, in 2012/13.

Gosford	Gosford Housing Association currently has 45 units with Economy 7 and has no Solid Fuel heating systems. The Association has no plans to replace these heating systems in next two years but has undertaken to review their position after that time.
Grove	Grove Housing Association has only one unit with Economy 7 which cannot be replaced as the tenant refuses the upgrade. They have no Solid Fuel heating systems.
Habinteg	Habinteg Housing Association currently has 105 units with Economy 7 heating. They have no Solid Fuel heating systems. A detailed Stock Condition Survey has been carried out by independent assessors in 2010. All planned maintenance work, including any upgrade to insulation and/or any replacement of heating systems will be carried out in accordance with the recommendations of this extensive survey and according to its schedule of works/Planned maintenance programme.
Harmony Homes	Harmony Homes has 62 units with solid fuel heating and plans to carry out conversions within the Association's "3 Streets Project", commencing March 2012 and lasting 2.5 years. They have 105 units with Economy 7 heating, nine of which will be changed to gas during this contract. Their remaining 96 units with Economy 7 are contained in three sheltered schemes and they have no plans to replace this.
Helm	Helm Housing currently has 18 Solid Fuel systems which have not been replaced because their tenants refuse upgrades. Of the 1,216 units with Economy 7, Helm aims to replace 100 of these with gas in 2012/13 under Cosy Homes Scheme and will continue with this programme, subject to the availability of funding.
Oaklee	Oaklee Homes Group has 1,124 units with Economy 7 heating and 10 with Solid Fuel. Their current life cycle renewal is set out in their planned maintenance system at 25 years – making the last conversion planned for 2024. However, following a recent recommendation that Oaklee carry out an analysis of Economy 7, a paper has gone to the Association's Board to consider bringing forward planned conversions to 2020 (154 conversion per annum.)
Open Door	Open Door Housing Association currently has 39 units, none of which are Solid Fuel. It has one unit with Economy 7, but the tenant refuses upgrade. The remain 38 units are in a new build scheme which is only 10 years old and the heating system is due to be replaced within the next few years. However, as no gas supply is available, the Association is currently exploring energy efficient alternatives.
Shac	SHAC currently has 267 tenancies with Economy 7 heating and 17 with Solid Fuel. As part of the Oaklee Homes Group, it is included in the paper sent to the Association's Board to consider accelerating the planned conversion programme.
South Ulster	South Ulster Housing Association has 148 properties with Economy 7 heating and no solid fuel heating systems. They have no plans to replace Economy 7 heating systems as they are in apartment blocks.
Triangle	Triangle Housing Association has no units with solid fuel. They have 59 units with Economy 7 heating and aims to replace these with mainly gas at the end of their lifespan.
Trinity	Trinity Housing Association currently has 33 units with Economy 7 and no Solid Fuel heating systems. It aims to upgrade 12 of these units to gas, where it is available, in 2012/13. The Association advises that it has a number of elderly tenants who refuse upgrades to alternative heating systems.
Ulidia	Ulidia Housing Association currently has 24 units with Economy 7. It has no plans to upgrade these as 22 are not on the gas network or there is insufficient space to accommodate an oil tank. The remaining two units with Economy 7 cannot be upgraded as their tenants refuse upgrade.

Wesley	Wesley Housing Association currently has 87 units with Economy 7. It aims to upgrade all of these units between 2016/19 to gas.
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Disability Living Allowance: Alcohol/Drug Addiction

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance because of (i) alcohol addiction; and (ii) drug addiction.

(AQW 8581/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Entitlement to Disability Living Allowance is based on an assessment of how much help someone needs with personal care and/or mobility needs because of their disability. Drug or alcohol dependency does not therefore confer entitlement to Disability Living Allowance.

My Department previously reported on the primary disabling conditions for Disability Living Allowance recipients. Following a review and a consultation process on a revised set of reports on Disability Living Allowance, my department ceased publishing this information in February 2011. The last report is available at www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/publications/dla.htm.¹

- 1 The information provided is an Official Statistic. The Production and dissemination of all such Statistics is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority

Ministerial Meetings: DWP

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister for Social Development when he is next due to meet Ministers in the Department for Work and Pensions; and what items will be for discussion.

(AQW 8594/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am meeting Lord Freud, the Department for Work and Pensions Minister for Welfare Reform, in London on 13 March 2012. At that meeting we will be discussing a range of Welfare Reform issues including passported benefits and potential flexibilities within Welfare Reform as well as Department for Work and Pensions jobs in Belfast.

Housing Executive: Ministerial Meetings

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister for Social Development how many times he has met with the Board of the Housing Executive since coming into office.

(AQW 8596/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Whilst I have met the Chairman and other individual members of the Board at various meetings, I have formally met the Board of the Housing Executive once on the 29 February 2012.

Housing Executive: Ministerial Meetings

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister for Social Development when he last met with the Board of the Housing Executive; and what subjects were discussed.

(AQW 8597/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I last met with the Board of the Housing Executive on 29 February 2012 to discuss the fundamental review of the Housing Executive and my housing priorities.

Employment and Support Allowance: Appeal Rate

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are currently receiving the appeal rate of the Employment and Support Allowance, broken down by district council area.

(AQW 8600/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As Employment and Support Allowance does not have an appeal rate, the information requested is not available.

Homelessness: Council Area

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are currently classified as homeless, broken down by (i) constituency; and (ii) council area.

(AQW 8603/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not routinely collate information by Parliamentary Constituency. The table below gives details of those accepted as statutorily homeless (Full Duty Applicant) by Council area at 31 March 2011, which are the most recent figures available.

Council Area	Accepted as homeless (Full Duty applicant)
Antrim Borough Council	388
Ards Borough Council	455
Armagh City and District Council	122
Ballymena Borough Council	498
Ballymoney Borough Council	102
Banbridge District Council	145
Belfast City Council	2766
Carrickfergus Borough Council	260
Castlereagh Borough Council	434
Coleraine Borough Council	347
Cookstown District Council	85
Craigavon Borough Council	307
Derry City Council	932
Down District Council	299
Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council	322
Fermanagh District Council	159
Larne Borough Council	128
Limavady Borough Council	130
Lisburn City Council	862
Magherafelt District Council	121
Moyle District Council	100
Newry & Mourne District Council	324
Newtownabbey Borough Council	556
North Down Borough Council	425
Omagh District Council	92
Strabane District Council	84
Total	10443

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Housing Executive: Vandalism in North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how much the Housing Executive has spent, as a result of vandalism, in the North Down area in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8605/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The figures below detail the total spend by the Housing Executive as a result of vandalism in the Housing Executive's Bangor District Office area in each of the last three years: -

2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
£20,634	£44,532	£12,024

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Decent Homes Standard

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development what plans the Housing Executive and Housing Associations have to insulate all their properties to the Decent Homes Standard.

(AQW 8614/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive implemented a major programme to install cavity wall insulation in the mid to late 1980s. The 2009 House Condition Survey indicated that only 5.2% of Housing Executive dwellings had no wall insulation. These are largely non-traditional property types which do not have cavity walls, for which the Housing Executive is considering alternative means of wall insulation. With regards to loft insulation the 2009 House Condition Survey indicated that only 1.2% of Housing Executive stock had no loft insulation and they have been installing and upgrading this through External Cyclical maintenance and heating schemes. In terms of improving thermal efficiency, the Housing Executive also estimates that approximately 50% of its stock has some degree of double glazing and they are currently working to identify those properties which still require double glazing. Once this information is available, as required in the draft Programme for Government, by March 2012, it will prepare a programme for the installation of glazing to all Housing Executive homes by the end of 2015. In addition, the Housing Executive currently installs double glazing both as part of its planned External Cyclic Maintenance programme and as part of a dedicated programme for such work. Extra funding secured through the Monitoring Round has enabled an increase in this activity.

The majority of Housing Associations have advised me that most of their properties already meet the Decent Homes Standard. They intend that any remaining properties will have upgraded insulation installed to the Decent Homes Standard as part of maintenance programmes or at times of change of tenancy, subject to the availability of funding.

Housing Benefit: Shared Accommodation

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development, in light of the changes to the shared accommodation rate for Housing Benefit, what measures are being considered to mitigate the difficulties that may be faced by those in receipt of the benefit.

(AQW 8687/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There have been a number of measures that have been put in place to mitigate the effect of the recent legislation relating to the extension of the age limit from 25 to 35 within the Housing Benefit scheme for the Shared Accommodation Rate for private rented sector tenants. These include:-

- From 16 November, providing early advice to all those affected on the potential impact on their Housing Benefit so they can make informed decisions about their accommodation needs;
- Ensuring that changes will be implemented on a rolling basis when an individual's claim comes forward for renewal. This provides transitional protection from the effect of the change for some existing claimants for periods ranging up to December 2012;
- Exemptions from the legislation for certain vulnerable groups;
- An increase in the fund available for Discretionary Housing Payments from £1.7m to £3.4m to assist claimants in meeting the reduction to their existing awards.

As regards future actions, I have written to the Housing Executive to ask them to consider what further Housing Services might be developed for those affected, including the implications for the Social Rented Sector. I have also commissioned research to gain a further insight into the impact of the changes. This research is due to report in June 2012.

I have also been advised by NIHE that they estimate there are upwards of 30,000 bedspaces available for persons who are prepared to live in shared accommodation in the private rented sector.

Derelict Properties: Village Area, South Belfast

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development what action has been taken to address the problems that have occurred in the Village area of South Belfast, as a result of the significant number of derelict properties awaiting demolition.

(AQW 8688/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has already demolished 178 properties within the Village Area of South Belfast and is currently involved in further demolitions within the Monarch Area (Phase 2) which will continue until the end of March. Other demolition will be progressed in the main Village Re-Development Area and is expected to continue for a number of months. In the meantime, all remaining vacant properties have been secured and are re-secured immediately if vandalised or broken into.

I recognise that during this time of change for the area, there have been many problems specifically for those remaining residents still living there. I understand there have been over 50 cases forwarded for prosecutions for theft from empty properties thanks to the vigilance of the local community, Housing Executive and local PSNI working together.

The Housing Executive has a dedicated Neighbourhood Officer who carries out daily inspections of the area to ascertain if there has been any vandalism, theft etc. This has been supplemented by the provision a community based officer who will inspect the area on weekends and holiday periods through the provision of a Community Service Agreement with the Greater Village Regeneration Trust.

A Housing Officer is also available on a daily basis to answer any queries relating to the redevelopment of the area and a Housing Executive sub-office operates on a Wednesday afternoon.

Fuel Allowance Payment: North Down

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in the North Down area will receive the one-off fuel allowance payment this year.

(AQW 8731/11-15)

Mr McCausland: All customers who were in receipt of Pension Credit, Income Support, Jobseekers Allowance Income Based or Employment Support Allowance Income Related during the qualifying week from 12 to 18 December 2011 are entitled to receive the one-off Fuel Allowance Payment. To date my Department has identified 7,136 people in North Down area who meet the required eligibility criteria.

In some cases, additional information may still be required before a decision can be made on the eligibility of a claim to a qualifying benefit. Payment of the one-off Fuel Allowance Payment to qualifying customers will be made as soon as possible thereafter.

Housing Executive: Temporary Accommodation

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development how much the Housing Executive has paid to private landlords for providing temporary accommodation in the Derry district office area in each of the last three years.

(AQW 8743/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below details the number of private landlord properties used by the Housing Executive in its Collon Terrace, Waterloo Place and Waterside District Office areas as follows: -

Year	Number of properties	*Approximate cost per year
2009/10	140	£957,320
2010/11	171	£1,169,272
2011/12 to date	210	£1,435,980

* The Housing Executive has advised that, given the transient nature of this group, these costs are approximate as not all properties are occupied at all times and not all tenants are on full housing benefit. In addition, the figures are based on an average rent of £131.50 per week per property.

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Housing Executive: Temporary Accommodation

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development how many private properties in the Foyle area are currently being used as temporary accommodation by the Housing Executive.

(AQW 8744/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive currently uses 210 private landlord properties in its Collon Terrace, Waterloo Place and Waterside district office areas as temporary accommodation.

Economically Inactive Long-term Sick People

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) what research has been carried out on the number of economically inactive long-term sick people; (ii) the number of economically inactive long-term sick people, broken down by illness; and (iii) how much long-term sickness costs his Department each year.

(AQW 8748/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The definition of economic inactivity (as defined within the UK Statistics Authority Publication Hub) is as follows: "Economically inactive people are not in work and do not meet the internationally agreed definition of unemployment. They are people without a job who have not actively sought work in the last four weeks and/or are not available to start work in the next two weeks".

- (i) My Department has conducted specific research on economically inactive long-term sick people claiming social security benefits, this research and statistical analysis, in relation to claimants of Incapacity Benefit and/or Employment Support Allowance, is listed below:
- The production of quarterly National Statistics Publications which provides detailed analysis of both Incapacity Benefit and Employment and Support Allowance customers http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/stats_and_research/benefit_publications.htm ;
 - An analysis of the Employment and Support Allowance customer activity at each stage of the Employment and Support Allowance journey;
 - Customer Satisfaction Survey for IB Re-Assessment Customers who have used the Customer Support and Advise Team (CAST) during the Re-Assessment process; and

- The Department has recently published a draft Equality Impact Assessment on the Welfare Reform (NI) Bill (2)
 - <http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/consultations/archived-consultations/archived-consultations-2009/consultations-equality-impact-assessment-on.htm>
- (ii) The information requested is not available as there is no current reliable data source that can be used to accurately estimate numbers of economically inactive long-term sick people.
- (iii) The Social Security Agency administers the following benefits in respect of long term sickness:
- Incapacity Benefit
 - Income Support (Long Term Sick)
 - Severe Disablement Allowance

Expenditure on the above benefits for the last three financial years is included below.

Benefit	2008/09 £'000	2009/10 £'000	2010/11 £'000
Incapacity Benefit	336,590*	321,401	298,760
Income Support (Long Term Sick)	298,313	305,463	292,588
Severe Disablement Allowance	40,815	42,265	41,214

* Incapacity Benefit for the 2008/09 financial year was not paid exclusively in respect of long term sickness.

The table below includes expenditure for those social security benefits that may also be paid in respect of, but not exclusively for, long term sickness. This table also includes expenditure for Carer's Allowance which is paid under qualifying conditions to an individual who cares for someone who is ill or has a disability.

Benefit	2008/09 £'000	2009/10 £'000	2010/11 £'000
Disability Living Allowance	679,452	728,373	753,456
Industrial Injuries Benefit	27,622	28,726	28,653
Employment Support Allowance	4,641	52,598	94,576
Careers Allowance	90,401	97,999	103,573

Economically Inactive Long-term Sick People

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development what research has been carried out into why there are 5000 more people who are economically inactive due to long-term sickness this year compared to last year.

(AQW 8749/11-15)

Mr McCausland: No information has been provided on the source which supports your claim that there are 5000 more people who are economically inactive due to long term sickness this year as compared to last year. I am therefore unable to provide an answer to your question.

Housing Executive: Payments to Staff

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development whether the £250 recently paid to Housing Executive staff is a one-off payment, or whether future payments will be made to staff earning less than £21,000.

(AQW 8751/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive is governed by pay arrangements set nationally by the National Joint Council for Local Government Services. The £250 payment for those staff earning less than £21,000 is at this point, a one-off payment.

Empty Properties: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to provide a breakdown of the empty properties identified within the North Down constituency, broken down by (i) whether it is a (a) house; (b) flat; or (c) former small business premises; and (ii) whether it has (a) one; (b) two; or (c) three/four bedrooms. **(AQW 8762/11-15)**

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not routinely collate information by Parliamentary constituency. However, the Housing Executive's Bangor District office updated figures record 69 void properties within their stock at 28 February 2012, as follows:-

Property Type	Number
4 Bedroom house	1
3 Bedroom house	14
2 Bedroom house	2
1 Bedroom bungalow	2
2 Bedroom bungalow	12
3 Bedroom bungalow	2
1 Bedroom flat	24
2 Bedroom flat	12

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Trade Union: Secondment

Mr McCallister asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the number of (a) full-time; and (b) part-time staff who are currently on secondment from his Department, or its arm's length bodies, to each recognised trade union; (ii) the salary scale for each secondee; and (iii) the length of each secondment to date.

(AQW 8781/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Department for Social Development has 4 full-time staff and no part-time staff currently on secondment to NIPSA. Salary scale details and the length of each secondment, to date, are set out in the table below. In relation to the Department's arms-length bodies, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has 3 full-time staff and no part-time staff seconded out and the relevant details are also provided in the table below. The other 2 bodies i.e. Ilex Urban Regeneration Company and the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland have no staff on secondment to a recognised trade union.

Organisation	Number of Staff on secondment to a recognised Trade Union	Grade	Trade Union	Salary Bandwidth	Length of each Secondment to date
DSD	4 full-time	3x E02 1xE01	NIPSA NIPSA	£21,392 - £23,250 £23,336 - £26,086	8 years 8 months 5 years 8 months; 4 years 1 month. 4 years 6 months;
NIHE	3 full-time	1x level 2 1xlevel 4 1x level 5	UNITE NIPSA NIPSA	£13,189 -£16,054 £16,830 - £22,958 £21,519 - £26,276	2 years 2 months; 12 years 3 months; 4 years 10 months;

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Housing Executive: Succession of Tenancy

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to Housing Executive properties (i) why dependants have to be registered on a rent book for 12 months, after they become 18 years of age, before they are entitled to a succession of tenancy; and (ii) for his Department's assessment of the difficulties this causes young people when their guardians die or move away.

(AQW 8812/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Dependents do not have to be registered on a rent book for 12 months after they become 18 years of age before they are entitled to a succession of tenancy. If a dependent's name is on a rent book for a property they are in fact a joint tenant and the rules for succession of tenancy do not apply.

However, if the dependent is not on the rent book for the property (i.e. they are not a joint tenant) a succession of tenancy can still occur via a statutory right as identified in the Housing (NI) Order 1983 for secure tenancies and in the Housing (NI) Order 2003 for introductory tenancies. The following categories of people can succeed on statutory grounds:-

- (a) The wife or husband or civil partner of the deceased.
- (b) A member of the deceased's family, if the member of the family was residing with the deceased throughout a period of 12 months ending on the date of the deceased's death. At the time of the deceased's death, the family member must have occupied the relevant dwelling as his / her only or principal home.

In many circumstances difficulties establishing proof of residence arise as a result of tenants not notifying the Housing Executive when someone joins or leaves their household.

In order to meet the requirement in (b) above the Housing Executive seeks to establish that the applicant for succession has indeed resided at the relevant property for a period of 12 months. In applying this criterion the Housing Executive considers all relevant information which could include amongst other things proof that the applicant was declared on a Housing Benefit application at the dwelling in question or other documents proving residence.

In addition to statutory rights to succession there are also instances under the Housing Selection Scheme rules (Rule 74) where there are certain policy grounds for a succession. In this situation the Housing Executive considers each case on its own merits. Examples of possible scenarios are: -

- A carer only if he/she was living with the deceased for a time in order to care for him / her and for that reason had sold a dwelling or given up a tenancy or licence in relation to a dwelling. (For the purposes of this paragraph, a tenancy or licence shall be ignored if the carer had been granted the said tenancy or licence by a relative).
- The potential successor has accepted responsibility for the deceased tenant's dependants.

There are also very limited grounds for an assignment of a tenancy. However, where an applicant does not meet the legislative or policy criteria to an assignment or succession then the Housing Executive carries out a homeless assessment to identify whether or not the applicant is owed a statutory duty. In addition to this the applicant will be provided with advice and assistance.

In the event that a person is not entitled to a succession or assignment of the tenancy the Housing Executive will provide comprehensive advice on alternative housing options and endeavour to find an appropriate housing solution.

Disability Living Allowance: Inequality

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the inequality issues arising from his Department's decision to not provide the mobility component of Disability Living Allowance in new assessments for individual who are 65 years of age or over, and to offer Attendance Allowance instead.

(AQW 8813/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I do not agree that there is an equality issue arising from the decision to pay Attendance Allowance to new claimants over the age of 65. The social security system has many examples whereby different provision is made for people at different stages of their lives. There is a range of benefits payable to people of working age but a different range of benefits payable to people over State Pension age reflecting their different circumstances and needs.

For people who become disabled after the age of 65, Attendance Allowance provides well targeted financial assistance to people with the extra costs of their disability and helps maintain their independence. It is part of a package of assistance available to older people. Entitlement is based on the need for, and extra cost of, personal care which results from severe disability but it does not provide specific help with a person's mobility needs. However, recipients are able to use their benefit in whatever way best suits their needs and priorities, including meeting mobility costs.

The aim of Disability Living Allowance is to focus help with the extra costs of disability on people who become severely disabled earlier in life and who, as a consequence, face limited opportunities to work, earn and save compared to people without a disability. Disabled people of working age have less opportunity to work and save than those who do not have a disability and payment of the mobility component may, in some cases, help an individual get and retain employment. While it can remain in payment past the age of 65, it is right to give the most help with the extra costs of disability to those who are severely disabled earlier in life.

As you know it is planned to replace Disability Living Allowance with a new benefit, Personal Independence Payment which will be introduced for working-age claimants from April 2013. It is proposed that age thresholds will be maintained; however any final decision in relation to the introduction of the new benefit will be a matter for the Assembly.

Income Support: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what percentage of people in (i) the North Down area; (ii) the Ards area; and (iii) Northern Ireland are in receipt of income support.

(AQW 8818/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below shows the percentage of people aged 16 to 59 in receipt of Income Support compared to the total population aged 16 to 59 in (i) the North Down area; (ii) the Ards area; and (iii) Northern Ireland expressed as a percentage:

Area	Percentage of claimants
North Down Local Government District	4.1%
Ards Local Government District	4.7%
Northern Ireland	7.5%

Data Source: Northern Ireland Benefits Statistics Summary November 2011

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Housing Executive Properties: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development (i) on how many Housing Executive properties in the North Down area have problems with mould and dampness been reported in the last three years; and (ii) what measures the Housing Executive has taken to address this matter.

(AQW 8819/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Over the last three years the Housing Executive has received 317 reports of problems with mould and dampness from tenants in their Bangor District office area.

Mould growth is the main symptom of condensation and may be confused for damp. It is best treated by regular ventilation of the property. Where the Housing Executive is aware of condensation in a property the tenant will be advised that it can be prevented by:-

- Allowing air to circulate throughout the property by opening doors occasionally
- Using extractor fans in kitchens and bathrooms
- Opening windows when cooking
- Not blocking air vents
- Drying clothes outside if possible
- Ensuring there is ventilation in the property, especially bedrooms, during the night.

Reports of damp are assessed by the Housing Executive's maintenance staff and contractors on a case by case basis and the necessary remedial action is taken. Typical examples of work carried out would be:-

- Damp proof course
- Installation of extractor fans in kitchens
- Checking of water pipes in kitchens and bathrooms
- Cleaning of outside guttering to prevent water penetration
- Inspection of roofs and external doors

Every Housing Executive tenant is provided with a tenant's handbook at the start of their tenancy which includes advice on condensation. The Housing Executive also has a separate condensation advice leaflet which is available in all of their District offices and also online at www.nihe.gov.uk.

Housing Executive Properties: Four Bedrooms

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive properties have four bedrooms, broken down by district office area.

(AQW 8879/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below provides a breakdown of the Housing Executive's four bedroom properties by district office area.

District	Number of 4 Bed Properties
West Belfast	406
East Belfast	121
South Belfast	144
North Belfast	329
Shankill	46
Belfast Area Total	1,046
Bangor	57
Newtownards	84
Castlereagh	85
Lisburn Antrim Street	107
Lisburn Dairyfarm	112
Downpatrick	76
South East Total	521
Banbridge	46
Newry	231
Armagh	54
Lurgan	263
Portadown	107
Dungannon	105
Fermanagh	83
South Area Total	889
Ballymena	118
Antrim	83
Newtownabbey 1	70
Newtownabbey 2	39
Carrickfergus	67
Larne	48
Ballycastle	29
Ballymoney	40

District	Number of 4 Bed Properties
Coleraine	132
North East Total	626
Waterloo Place	209
Waterside	144
Collon Terrace	170
Limavady	90
Magherafelt	81
Strabane	198
Omagh	101
Cookstown	73
West Area Total	1,066
Total	4,148

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Housing Executive Properties: Vacancies

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development to provide a breakdown of the vacant Housing Executive properties broken down by (i) whether they has (a) four; (b) five; or (c) six bedrooms; and (ii) district office area.

(AQW 8883/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not collate vacant properties by the number of bedrooms. However, the table below provides a breakdown of vacant Housing Executive properties by district office area as at 31 January 2012.

District	Total Voids
West Belfast	61
East Belfast	113
North Belfast	301
Shankill	218
South Belfast	207
Belfast Total	900
Bangor	59
Newtownards	63
Castlereagh	80
Lisburn Antrim St.	46
Lisburn Diary Farm	16

District	Total Voids
Downpatrick	20
South East Total	284
Banbridge	24
Newry	22
Armagh	42
Lurgan/Brown	119
Portadown	18
Dungannon	20
Fermanagh	15
South Total	260
Ballymena	119
Antrim	31
Newtownabbey 1	128
Newtownabbey 2	23
Carrick	10
Larne	69
Ballycastle	9
Ballymoney	18
Coleraine	31
North East Total	438
Waterloo PI	17
Waterside	22
Collon Terrace	20
Limavady	12
Magherafelt	21
Strabane	19
Omagh	34
Cookstown	5
West Total	150
N.I. Total	2,032

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Housing Executive Properties: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive properties in the North Down area will have new kitchens installed within the next three years, broken down by (i) district office area; and (ii) the total associated costs.

(AQW 8889/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The current position regarding kitchen replacement schemes in Housing Executive properties in the North Down area in the next three years is as follows:-

Bangor District Office area:

- 2012/13 No schemes programmed
- 2013/14 Rathgill Estate – 36 dwellings at an estimated cost of £198,000
- 2014/15 Kilcooley Estate – 224 dwellings at an estimated cost of £1,232,000
Rathgill Estate – 95 dwellings at an estimated cost of £523,000

These planned schemes will be subject to funding being available.

Housing Executive Properties: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive properties in the North Down area will have natural gas installed within the next three years, broken down by (i) district office area; and (ii) the total associated costs

(AQW 8890/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The current position regarding the installation of natural gas systems to Housing Executive properties in the North Down area in the next three years is as follows:-

Bangor District Office area;

- 2012/13 Rathgill/Jubilee Estates – 42 dwellings at an estimated cost of £277,000
- 2013/14 Kilcooley Estate Economy 7 – 53 dwellings at an estimated cost of £350,000
- 2014/15 No schemes programmed

These planned schemes will be subject to funding being available.

Benefits: Uptake

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what action is being taken to reduce the level of unclaimed benefits.

(AQW 8891/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Promoting benefit uptake is a key priority for the Department and the Social Security Agency has taken a proactive approach to increasing uptake since 2005.

The Social Security Agency, through its annual Benefit Uptake Programmes, has used a range of direct targeting, promotional and community outreach approaches to increase the uptake of all benefits. This work has generated an additional £37.6 million in annual benefit and arrears for over 11,000 people to date.

In 2011/12 significant additional investment has been made in benefit uptake, taking the annual spend to in excess of £1.3m across 4 complementary approaches:

- 25,000 people, selected from existing customer data, have received a personal invitation to have a full benefits assessment through a contracted partner in the independent advice sector.
- A promotional approach at council and community level involving trusted partners such as community and older peoples' groups, general practitioners, pharmacies and church/faith based

groups. Entitlement checks are delivered by telephone with home visits offered to those who require assistance with making a claim.

- The “Make the Call” advertising campaign is an extension of this approach and is a television, radio, press and outdoor advertising campaign aimed at older people. Over 12,000 calls have been received to date and ongoing monitoring indicates that around 40% of callers have potential entitlement.
- A £375,000 Innovation Fund for Increasing Benefit Uptake has funded 7 projects led by the community and voluntary sector partners to test new and innovative ways of reaching people with potential unclaimed benefit entitlement.

A wide range of general services are also in place to make people aware of their potential entitlement to benefit. These include the production of specific publications, some in minority ethnic languages; NI Direct website; an online Benefits Adviser Service; general assistance with information available through our network of local and centralised offices.

Capital Projects: Foyle

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department has any plans for capital projects in the Foyle area in the 2011-15 budget period.

(AQW 8913/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In 2011/12 my Department, through various funding programmes, has invested in a range of capital projects. Under the UK City of Culture 2013 Investment Fund we are delivering 12 public realm schemes in Londonderry including works on Queen’s Quay, Foyle Embankment, Spencer Road and at Strand Road. We are funding a ReStore pilot project targeting retail premises on Spencer Road, Union Hall Place and Bank Place and in the restoration and refurbishment works at the Guildhall. Through Ilex Urban Regeneration Company around 30 community infrastructure projects across the city will also be supported under this funding programme. Projects at Holywell Trust, St Columb’s Park House and Creggan Neighbourhood Partnership are benefiting from the Modernisation Fund Capital Programme and under the Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund we are investing in projects at Old Library Trust, Caw Nelson Drive Action Group as well as the Fountain Multi Use Games Area.

For 2012/13 and beyond plans are in place to provide further funding to Ilex for the community infrastructure projects in respect of the UK City of Culture 2013 and the decontamination of Fort George. Subject to appraisal there are plans to further enhance the city’s Public Realm, to extend the ReStore pilot and to invest in a City Dressing scheme. We are also considering investing in the new North West Regional Sports Campus project at St Columb’s Park, the proposed Science Park at Fort George and the Waterside Greenway. We continue to work closely with the four Neighbourhood Partnerships in the city to identify capital development priorities in their respective Neighbourhood Renewal Areas.

Whilst my Department will not have additional funding for the One Plan for Londonderry, the work and budget of my North West Development Office will be prioritised in line with the Transformational Themes set out in the Plan. My Department will also champion the Quality Spaces, Places and Neighbourhoods Catalyst Programme and work with key stakeholders to ensure delivery of projects under that programme.

Housing Executive Properties: Newbuilds in Derry

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development when construction of the new housing schemes for Glen Court and Cedar Court, Derry will commence.

(AQW 8917/11-15)

Mr McCausland: These schemes are not in the current programme to be started before the end of this financial year. I am now reviewing the Social Housing Development Programme for 2012-2015 and if these schemes form part of that programme, they will be published on the Housing Executive website. (www.nihe.gov.uk) in due course.

Mortgages

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development, given that there was an increase in the number of mortgages issued in the final quarter of 2011, what action his Department intends to take to ensure this upward trend continues.

(AQW 8958/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My ministerial colleague Sammy Wilson and I met banking industry representatives late in 2011 and I am heartened that greater numbers of mortgage products are becoming available for consumers, including Co-Ownership applicants. Officials from both my Department and the Department of Finance and Personnel continue to engage with the industry to ensure this trend continues.

In addition I have also increased the funding available for Co-Ownership to £103.25 million up to 2014/15 and will explore new intermediate housing models to increase the number of affordable homes available.

Business Improvement Districts

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development (i) when in 2012 he intends to introduce primary legislation on Business Improvement Districts; and (ii) whether he is able to introduce the legislation soon, given the delays that have already occurred.

(AQW 9048/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Subject to Executive agreement, I plan to introduce a Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) Bill, which is currently being drafted, to the Assembly before the summer recess. This should allow time for the Bill to complete its Assembly passage by the end of the year which is in line with my previous commitments in relation to this piece of legislation.

Boiler Replacement Scheme

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development whether he intends to launch a Boiler Replacement Scheme, given that the pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme ends on 31 March 2012.

(AQW 9055/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme has been very successful and the Housing Executive is no longer taking applications for the scheme. The scheme will close on 31 March and will then be subject to a full evaluation which will determine if the pilot scheme should continue.

Installers engaged in carrying out boiler replacement for applications which have already been approved, should ensure works have been completed and electrical certificate and Building Control certificates are submitted to their local Grant Office before 31 March 2012.

Housing Executive: Temporary Accommodation in Derry

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 8743/11-15, what plans he has to address the increase in the number and cost of properties being used as temporary accommodation by the Housing Executive in the Derry area.

(AQW 9316/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has a statutory responsibility to provide temporary accommodation for those who find themselves homeless.

However, social housing cannot be the only answer to meet the housing needs of those that find themselves homeless or the 40,000 applicants on the waiting list. We clearly need to find a more holistic and sustainable solution to housing need for all who need a home. The forthcoming welfare reform changes will have a particular impact on a wide range of younger people and we are undertaking some research at the minute to identify the scale of that impact.

In the meantime I plan to bring forward a new housing strategy that will seek to create more choice, opportunity and provide access to a wider range of people to whom social housing can not meet their needs and this will be announced in the coming months.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Paper Wastage

Mr McKay asked the Assembly Commission whether it has considered contacting non-governmental organisations, Government Departments and companies to urge them to give MLAs the option of receiving reports and correspondence by email to minimise paper wastage.

(AQW 8566/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly Commission (the Commission) has not considered contacting non-governmental organisations, Government Departments and companies to urge them to give MLAs the option of receiving reports and correspondence by email to minimize paper wastage. However, it is noted that an increasing number of organisations are now using electronic means of distribution and communication.

The Commission has sought preferences from Members in relation to their receipt of internal official publications and is committed to reducing direct and indirect environmental impact through the adoption of effective resource and waste management programmes within the Northern Ireland Assembly as outlined within our Sustainable Development Strategy.

The Commission recognises that Members receive a large amount of information in hard copy from external agencies and would be supportive of any Member reducing unnecessary consumption. The Assembly's Communications Office will contact those Members' who have not yet provided an email address on the Assembly website, and encourage them to do so.

If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact our Environmental Services Manager, Ms Christine Watts on Ext 21265 to discuss.

Trade Union: Funding

Mr McCallister asked the Assembly Commission to detail the level of funding it allocated to each trade union in the (i) 2000/01; (ii) 2005/06; and (iii) 2010/11 financial years.

(AQW 8766/11-15)

Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly Commission does not allocate direct funding to any trade union. However, the Assembly Commission recognises the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) for consultation and negotiation purposes and reasonable provision is made for staff of the Commission to engage in trade union activities connected with consultation and negotiation on staffing matters.

In 2000/01 and 2005/06 the Commission did not allocate any direct funding to meet the cost of trade union activities. In 2010/11, the Assembly Commission met the salary costs of one seconded Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) member of staff to NIPSA to assist with the development of effective industrial relations. The salary band for this member of staff was £29,543 - £33,446 and we also paid associated employer costs such as pension contributions and National Insurance costs. Under the terms of a Joint Agreement with NIPSA, the Commission also permits certain Officers of the local Branch of NIPSA to undertake reasonable trade union activities. However, such activities are undertaken without adverse impact on business requirements so the notional cost of these activities is not recorded.

Printer Ink Cartridges: Procurement

Mr Eastwood asked the Assembly Commission what measures are in place to ensure the procurement of printer ink cartridges is not abused by Members.

(AQW 8962/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The policy on supply of IT Consumables is referred to in the Members handbook (pg. E70) where it states:

“Members are entitled to the following computer consumables, for use in the supplied printers centrally funded, currently OKI C5900 and C5550 MFP which can be obtained from Office Resources, room B35

- Laser paper
- Replacement toner kits and the consumables for those colour laser printers supplied by the IS Office on behalf of the Assembly Commission

If you bring your used toner kits when collecting the new replacement, the Stationery Office will send them to be recycled.

Consumables must be only used for Assembly Business”

In relation to the supply of all IT consumables provided by Office Resources, there are currently no restrictions on the number of products that a Member can request; however, staff in Office Resources will provide Members advice if required, on the most efficient use of toners.

A full record of both Oki and other printer ink products provided to Members is maintained and updated by Office Resources.

The Assembly Commission has considered enhanced governance arrangements for the use of office consumables and at its meeting on 29th November 2011, the following was agreed:

- That expenditure by Members on office consumables would be published for 2011-2012 at the same time as information on Office Cost Expenditure is published.
- That the provision of a second class option for pre-paid envelopes should be included when undertaking the next procurement exercise, due to commence in early 2012.
- That in future, orders for consumables must be approved by the MLAs themselves.

I would ask you to note that responsibility for office consumables has now passed to the Independent Financial Review Panel.

MLAs: Pension Contributions

Mr Agnew asked the Assembly Commission, pursuant to AQW 6197/11-15 (i) who are the five Members appointed to act as Trustees; (ii) to detail the scheme rules; and (iii) to provide a copy of the Statement of Investment Principles for Members’ pensions.

(AQW 8989/11-15)

Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):

- (i) The current Pension Trustees were appointed by resolution of the Assembly on 28 June 2011 and comprise:
- Mr Trevor Lunn MLA (Chairman)
 - Mr Mickey Brady MLA
 - Mr John Dallat MLA
 - Mr Ross Hussey MLA
 - Mr Jim Wells MLA
- (ii) The Scheme Rules are available on the Members’ Pension Scheme pages of the Assembly website at <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Your-MLAs/Members-Pension-Scheme>.
- (iii) The Statement of Investment Principles is also available on the Members’ Pension Scheme pages of the Assembly website.

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

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Invest NI Funding

In this Bound Volume, page WA 470, replace the answer to the question (AQW 8734/11-15) asked by Mr W Clarke with:

Mrs Foster (Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): As Invest NI was only established in 2002, the information contained in this answer relates to the 9 financial years 2002-03 to 2010-11.

Table 1 shows the amount of assistance offered by Invest NI in the South Down Parliamentary Constituency Area (PCA) between 2002-03 and 2010-11 broken down by type of business (Industrial sector).

Table 1: Invest NI Assistance Offered in South Down PCA by Industrial Sector (2002-03 to 2010-11)

SECTOR	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Business & Financial Services	1,955	19,876	180,672	142,755	68,820	52,488	70,797	51,893	147,112
Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals	14,250	-	10,126	80,119	41,828	20,000	-	74,700	15,585
Clothing & Textiles	1,554,320	38,675	303,905	-	1,056	-	-	25,200	1,000
Construction Services	-	100	1,568	74,558	97,985	71,492	16,400	264,950	204,381
Electrical, Electronic & Optical Equipment	-	8,000	-	91,037	4,400	-	-	1,000	12,900
External Delivery Organisations	-	100,000	14,729	-	-	-	5,000	-	-
Fabricated Metal & Metal Finishing	94,604	410,879	60,973	5,133	66,003	134,599	410,435	419,748	138,997
Food, Drink & Tobacco	478,804	31,646	103,852	165,799	135,804	119,183	115,630	573,106	157,853
Glass, Ceramic & Concrete Products	3,120	70,476	441,556	21,306	25,280	353,786	14,900	163,942	24,000
Non-Electrical Machinery	10,000	109,134	131,561	55,108	110,078	15,647	73,586	17,500	42,197
Other Manufacturing	34,175	42,310	16,824	3,673,183	21,000	58,881	8,167,198	278,872	37,847
Other Services	111,873	161,793	2,735,717	25,820	6,302	368,143	99,294	242,706	89,513
Paper Products, Printing & Publishing	5,360	939	945	4,100	48,386	14,903	-	5,000	-

SECTOR	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Rubber & Plastic products	26,500	2,700	849	-	25,000	39,184	5,000	28,584	20,075
Software & Computer Services	24,340	27,252	1,795	-	4,440	55,956	95,757	160,511	124,509
Transport Equipment	32,010	27,590	260,739	290,250	84,635	29,700	163,704	1,981,412	102,324
Wood Products	2,120	-	63,334	30,453	4,255	9,092	3,450	77,398	15,000
Total	2,393,431	1,051,371	4,329,144	4,659,619	745,272	1,343,054	9,241,151	4,366,522	1,133,293

Table 2 shows the amount of assistance offered by Invest NI in the South Down PCA between 2002-03 and 2010-11 broken down by area (District Electoral Area (DEA)).

Table 2: Invest NI Assistance Offered in South Down PCA by DEA (2002-03 to 2010-11)

DEA	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Ballynahinch	66,450	87,446	38,872	-	1,056	99,184	29,800	142,017	67,302
Crotlieve	173,285	221,159	479,789	503,515	134,400	141,501	308,604	526,191	354,305
Downpatrick	142,110	108,227	169,374	78,558	129,586	253,645	172,016	402,126	90,621
Dromore	-	-	62,437	12,500	84,885	118	26,022	112,576	18,000
Knockiveagh	1,552,500	5,375	312,280	-	33,410	180,413	16,450	175,472	735
Newcastle	119,067	21,391	2,552,032	123,964	74,232	12,507	40,950	349,447	272,753
Rowallane	323,249	103,000	21,604	80,327	6,100	93,800	2,400	7,283	3,850
The Fews	1,820	232	1,304	408	96,880	72,079	82,783	749,305	163,916
The Mourmes	14,950	504,541	691,452	3,860,347	184,723	489,807	8,562,126	1,915,355	163,579
TOTAL	2,393,431	1,051,371	4,329,144	4,659,619	745,272	1,343,054	9,241,151	4,379,772	1,135,061

Notes to Tables 1 & 2:

- 1 A further £26,149 of assistance offered cannot be split at Table 1 level.
- 2 A further £11,131 of assistance offered cannot be split at Table 2 level.
- 3 Sectors are based on the UK Standard Industrial Classifications..
- 4 DEAs are based on NI Statistics & Research Agency Central Postcode Directory.
- 5 Invest NI revises performance data on a regular basis to ensure that it reflects implemented projects; therefore, the data above may differ to previously published information.

In addition, Invest NI offered assistance of £816,800 during the period to locally-owned start up businesses through the Start A Business programme. This support is shown by DEA in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Invest NI Assistance Offered Through the Start A Business Programme in South Down PCA by DEA (2002-03 to 2010-11)

DEA	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Ballynahinch	5,250	16,250	15,750	12,400	6,400	12,000	3,800	-	-
Crotlieve	42,250	32,000	55,250	34,100	16,400	21,600	11,800	-	-
Downpatrick	24,000	40,500	61,750	34,950	12,000	18,400	8,800	-	-
Dromore	1,750	4,500	3,750	2,800	400	400	1,200	-	-
Knockiveagh	3,250	11,750	5,000	8,100	7,600	4,800	3,400	-	-
Newcastle	18,500	24,500	39,250	24,150	12,600	13,000	12,200	-	-
Rowallane	5,750	3,750	12,000	5,050	800	2,800	1,200	-	-
The Fews	5,250	5,750	4,500	6,250	1,800	2,400	1,200	-	-
The Mourmes	13,250	9,750	22,000	8,750	5,800	7,000	3,200	-	-
Total	119,250	148,750	219,250	136,550	63,800	82,400	46,800	-	-

NOTES:

- 1 Start a Business Programme was renamed as the Enterprise Development Programme during 2009-10, which offers guidance and support but does not offer financial assistance.

Environment

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan

In this Bound Volume, page WA 117, replace the answer to the question (AQW 6865/11-15) asked by Mr Weir with:

Mr Attwood (Minister of the Environment): Draft BMAP was published in November 2004, and it covers 6 District Council areas including Belfast, Carrickfergus, Castlereagh, Lisburn, Newtownabbey and North Down. Nearly 4,000 objections were received in respect of the Draft Plan and a public inquiry was convened by the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) to consider these objections. This inquiry commenced in April 2007 and finished in May 2008.

Since the conclusion of the public inquiry, the PAC has considered all the information before it prior to making its recommendations available to my Department. The Commission's reports have been delivered over a period of time, beginning with the part relating to Strategic Retail Issues (received in January 2009), the part relating to the Strategic Plan Framework (received in March 2011), the reports on Belfast, Lisburn and Castlereagh Districts (received in July 2011), the reports on North Down District, and Lagan Valley Regional Park (received in September 2011) and finally the reports on Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey Districts (received in January 2012). Further outstanding information was also received from the PAC in February, but the Commission has now confirmed that it has considered all relevant objections and I can confirm that my Department has now received the full complement of reports from the PAC relating to BMAP.

My Department is currently considering the PAC recommendations and preparing the Plan for adoption. I am now assessing how best to manage the report, if parts can be taken forward ahead of full adoption in order to accelerate the issue and help create certainty in these difficult times.

At present it is anticipated that adoption will take place early in 2013.

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Cyberknife Stereotactic Body Radiotherapy

In Bound Volume 71, page WA 218, replace the answer to the question (AQW 7632/11-15) asked by Mrs Cochrane with:

Mr Poots (Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I have been advised by the Health and Social Care Board that during the calendar year 2011, they received requests from consultants within the HSC in Northern Ireland for funding approval to send a total of 56 patients to a specialist provider of stereotactic radiotherapy in another part of the United Kingdom. Of these, one request related specifically to the CyberKnife method of stereotactic radiotherapy.

All 56 patients were transferred for treatment, but in the case of the request relating specifically to the CyberKnife method, the HSCB requires additional information for what would now be a retrospective funding. There were no instances where a referral was not approved.

Payment of Invoices: 10-day Target

In Bound Volume 67, page WA 68, replace the answer to the question (AQW 2225/11-15) asked by Mr Campbell with:

Mr Poots (Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The table below shows the number of non-HSC invoices paid within 10 days and the percentage this represented of the total invoices received by each HSC Trust for 2010/11 and the five months ended 31 August 2011.

	2010-11		31 Aug 2011	
	Invoices paid within 10 days	% of total invoices received	Invoices paid within 10 days	% of total invoices received
Belfast	136,696	38.3	73,316	47.4
Northern	51,729	37.6	19,085	36.4
Southern	40,496	38.0	15,562	33.8
South Eastern	51,114	42.2	21,690	40.0
Western	54,032	54.5	23,510	56.2
N.I.A.S.	5,517	36.5	2,519	40.1

It is not possible to provide comparable information for the HSCB, as this could only be done at disproportionate cost.

Regional Development

Number of Civil Service Posts in Department

In this Bound Volume, page WA 187, replace the answer to the question (AQW 7694/11-15) asked by Mr Eastwood with:

Mr Kennedy (Minister for Regional Development): The information in respect of my Department is as follows:

DRD Posts* at 1 January 2007 by District Council Area

District Council	Analogous Grade Level						Total
	AA	AO	E01/E02	S0	DP	Grade 6/7	
Antrim	5	3	10	3	2	0	23
Ards	4	2	3	1	1	0	11
Armagh	11	7	10	3	1	0	32
Ballymena	42	54	91	55	23	5	270
Ballymoney	7	1	4	1	1	0	14
Banbridge	4	1	5	1	1	0	12
Belfast	115	209	406	222	202	86	1240
Carrickfergus	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Castlereagh	35	25	70	41	19	8	198
Coleraine	29	15	51	23	13	5	136
Cookstown	7	1	4	1	1	0	14
Craigavon	33	19	75	42	23	5	197
Derry	14	31	56	20	12	1	134
Down	30	24	64	26	14	3	161
Dungannon	9	3	8	2	1	0	23
Fermanagh	14	12	28	9	4	1	68
Larne	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Limavady	5	1	3	1	1	0	11
Lisburn	13	5	10	3	2	0	33
Magherafelt	5	2	6	1	1	0	15
Moyle	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Newry & Mourne	13	11	16	4	2	0	46
Newtownabbey	1	1	1	0	0	0	3
North Down	9	1	5	2	1	0	18
Omagh	20	21	54	31	14	5	145
Strabane	9	2	6	1	1	0	19
Unidentified	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
Total	434	451	987	494	340	119	2825

* In addition to these figures, there were a further 448 vacancies across all grades in DRD. This figure cannot be split by individual grade or by District Council area.

DRD Posts at 1 January 2012 by District Council Area**

District Council	Analogous Grade Level								
	AA	AO	E02	E01	S0	DP	Grade 7	Grade 6	Total
Antrim	6	3	0	9	3	2	0	0	23
Ards	5	3	0	5	1	1	0	0	15
Armagh	8	7	0	13	3	2	0	0	33
Ballymena	22	23	7	42	30	13	5	2	144
Ballymoney	5	1	0	6	1	1	0	0	14
Banbridge	5	1	0	6	1	0	0	0	13
Belfast	80	118	77	102	143	119	50	5	694
Carrickfergus	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Castlereagh	17	26	5	71	48	19	6	2	194
Coleraine	21	22	7	40	21	13	6	1	131
Cookstown	10	3	0	12	2	1	0	0	28
Craigavon	27	25	6	45	28	10	4	1	146
Derry	12	6	4	16	6	5	0	0	49
Down	23	29	8	44	23	14	3	1	145
Dungannon	10	5	0	8	3	1	0	0	27
Fermanagh	13	15	1	16	5	2	0	0	52
Larne	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Limavady	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Lisburn	15	2	0	8	2	1	0	0	28
Magherafelt	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Moyle	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Newry & Mourne	12	2	0	8	2	1	0	0	25
Newtownabbey	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3
North Down	7	2	0	4	1	1	0	0	15
Omagh	20	36	10	49	34	15	5	1	170
Strabane	7	2	0	6	1	1	0	0	17
Total	327	331	125	512	358	222	79	13	1967

** This includes funded and unfunded vacant posts

Social Development

Disability Living Allowance

In Bound Volume 70, page WA 372, replace the answer to the question (AQW 5959/11-15) asked by Mr McGlone with:

Mr McCausland (Minister for Social Development): The information is not available in the format requested as Disability Living Allowance appeals are not recorded by the different category types but on an overall basis. Appeals are received both from applicants who were unsuccessful (nil award) and also from those awarded one of the eleven different rates of Disability Living Allowance but were not satisfied with the particular rate awarded. The table below details the total number of Disability Living Allowance appeals processed by the Appeals Service where the decision was more advantageous to appellant. The main reason for more advantageous decisions is the provision of additional information at the tribunal hearing.

Year	Number of Appeals received in the Appeals Service	Number of Appeal Determinations which were more advantageous to appellant.
2008/09	7,016	1,942
2009/10	5,636	1,836
2010/11	5,580	1,651

Official Report
(Hansard)
Members' Index

MEMBERS' INDEX

Agnew, Mr Steven

Executive Committee Business
 Department of Justice, 130
 Marine Bill [NIA 5/11-15]
 Second Stage, 205–7

Matters of the Day
 Golf: Rory McIlroy, 176–7

Ministerial Statements
 Article 31 Planning Applications and Decisions, 147

Oral Answers
 Education
 North Eastern Education and Library Board: Youth Services, 27

Environment
 Allotments, 136

Regional Development
 Cycling, 243

Written Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Dog Collars: Electric Shock Capability, WA400
 Strangford Lough: Pot Fishing, WA18

Assembly Commission
 MLAs: Pension Contributions, WA621

Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Quoile Barrier: Fish Pass, WA412

Education
 Antenatal Appointments, WA36
 Classroom Assistants: Funding, WA414
 Staff Transfer, WA424

Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Hydraulic Fracturing:
 Climate Change, WA450
 Petroleum Licences, WA440, WA445, WA446
 North/South Electricity Interconnector, WA445
 Petroleum Licence Holders: Rights, WA54
 Petroleum Production (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010, WA446
 Shale Gas, WA273
 Tamboran Resources Ltd: Insurance Bonds, WA440
 Wind Turbines: Decommissioning Costs, WA450

Environment
 Dog Fouling
 Campaign, WA103
 Fines, WA103

Hydraulic Fracturing
 Fermanagh Waterways, WA91
 NIEA Briefing, WA120
 NIEA Training, WA300
 Planning Applications, WA304
 Pollution of Waterways, WA297
 Public Inquiry, WA298
 Water Testing in Fermanagh, WA69

Planning: Fast Food Restaurants, WA101
 Tamboran Resources Ltd: Planning Permission, WA115
 Water Pollution: Down Area, WA121

Finance and Personnel
 Account NI: PwC Contract, WA132
 Benefits: Failure to Claim, WA324
 Civil Servants: Retired but Working as Consultants, WA125

Funding: Cross-departmental Working, WA329
 Procurement and E-Procurement Systems, WA133

Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Children's Services: Cross-departmental Initiatives, WA511
 Dental Services: Savings Proposals, WA140
 Northern Ireland Electronic Care Record Outline
 Business Case: Software Companies, WA139, WA528, WA529

Justice
 Speeding up Justice Branch, WA554

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Ethnic Minority Development Fund, WA390
 Play and Leisure Policy, WA213

Regional Development
 Fixed Penalty Notices: Bus Lanes, WA189
 SmartPass, WA584

Social Development
 Boiler Replacement Scheme: Extension, WA386
 Green New Deal: Cost Benefit Analysis, WA377
 Housing Executive: Capital Spend, WA364

Allister, Mr Jim

Executive Committee Business
 Department of Justice, 126, 128–9, 129
 Marine Bill [NIA 5/11-15]
 Second Stage, 182, 202–4, 204–5, 209

Matters of the Day
 Golf: Rory McIlroy, 176

Ministerial Statements
 Article 31 Planning Applications and Decisions, 146
 North/South Ministerial Council
 Agriculture, 179
 Health and Food Safety, 221–2
 Languages, 88
 Waterways, 85
 Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland and Employer Engagement Plan, 227

Oral Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Queen Elizabeth II: Diamond Jubilee, 21

Employment and Learning
 DEL: Dissolution, 102

Finance and Personnel
 Public Sector Jobs, 140

Justice
 Rural Crime, 240

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 OFMDFM: Constitutional Convention, 196

Private Members' Business
 Decade of Centenaries, 116, 118

Written Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 DARD Headquarters: Relocation, WA399
 Equality Unit, WA7
 Job Advert: Irish, WA401
 Pig Producers: Export Opportunities, WA226
 Republican Monument: Crossmaglen, WA394, WA395
 Rural Crime, WA17
 Rural Development Programme, WA391

Republican Monument, Crossmaglen, WA240
Culture, Arts and Leisure

Hospitality: Spend, WA22, WA241
NI Screen: Board Appointments, WA247

Education

Education and Skills Authority: Chief Executive, WA42
Gaeltacht/Irish-medium Schools: Cross-border
Collaborative Programme, WA35

Employment and Learning

Belfast Metropolitan College: Former Premises, WA52
Equality Unit, WA48
Hospitality: Spend, WA51

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Electricity and Gas Prices: Green Policies, WA447
Electricity Prices, WA268
Energy Provision, WA54
Equality Unit, WA62
Ferry Prices, WA63
Ferry Services: Prices, WA464
'Our Time, Our Place': Orange Events, WA432
Trevor Bailie: Prosecution Costs, WA282

Environment

Historical Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI)
Order 1995, WA112
Planning Applications G/2011/0041/F and
G/2011/0162/F, WA96
Wind Farms: Planning Applications, WA96

Finance and Personnel

Civil Service: Job Applications, WA508

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Hospitality: Spend, WA139
Pseudomonas: Microbiological Standards, WA508,
WA509, WA512, WA513

Justice

Historic Crimes: Amnesty, WA170
Prison Service
Exit Scheme, WA570
Principal Officer Grade, WA177
RUC George Cross Foundation Regulations 2002, WA569
Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005, WA548
Trevor Bailie: Legal Aid Costs, WA349

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Artwork: OFMDFM Inventory, WA214
Hospitality: Spend, WA220
Religious Discrimination: Employment, WA1
Strategic Support Fund: FAIR Application, WA6

Regional Development

A5

Business Case, WA358
Contractors, WA359
Funding Breakdown, WA359
Inquiry, WA577
Length of Dual Carriageway, WA362
Upgrade, WA359
Hospitality: Spend, WA191
North-west Rail Link: Staffing, WA587
Rail Network
North-west Staff Reductions, WA362
Weekend Staff at Ballymena Railway Station, WA363
Trains: Driving Brake Standard Open Carriage, WA356
Trains: Gatwick Set, WA355
Translink
DDA Compliance, WA586

Managerial Appointments, WA587

Redundancies, WA586

Social Development

Hospitality: Spend, WA207
Street Trading Licences: Transfer, WA380

Anderson, Ms Martina

Oral Answers

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Ministerial Subcommittee on Children and Young
People, 60

Anderson, Mr Sydney

Oral Answers

Justice
Prison Service: Enhanced Severance, 236

Private Members' Business

Carjacking, 153–4

Written Answers

Education
Special Educational Needs: Proposals, WA44

Justice

Community Safety Strategy
Success, WA557
Update, WA556

Crimestoppers: Funding, WA557

Neighbourhood Watch Schemes: Funding, WA557

Attwood, Mr Alex

Adjournment

Parkgate Quarry, County Antrim, 265, 265–6, 266, 266–7

Executive Committee Business

High Hedges (Fee Transfer) Regulations (Northern Ireland)
2012, 212, 214–15

Marine Bill [NIA 5/11-15]

First Stage, 41

Second Stage, 180–2, 182, 182–3, 183, 207–9, 209,
209–10, 210–11

Matters of the Day

Golf: Rory McIlroy, 176

Ministerial Statements

Article 31 Planning Applications and Decisions, 142–3,
143, 143–4, 144, 145, 146, 147

Oral Answers

Environment

Allotments, 135, 135–6, 136
Association of British Insurers, 133, 134
Conservation: Hillsborough, 134, 134–5
Local Government Reform, 136, 136–7, 137

Private Members' Business

Undeveloped Sites, 167, 167–8

Revised Written Answers

Environment

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan, RWA4

Written Answers

Environment

160-220 Castlereagh Road, Belfast: Planning
Permission, WA484

Anaerobic Digesters and Wind Turbines: Funding, WA475

Archaeological Objects: Licence Requirements, WA485–6

Archaeological Sites and Monuments: Conservation, WA286

Areas of Townscape Character, WA486–96

- Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan
 Publication, WA120
 Timescale, WA113–14
- Brown Bins, WA96–8
- Built Heritage
 Investment, WA475
 Revenue Generated, WA474–5
- Carrier Bags: Single Use Levy, WA123, WA123–4, WA124, WA125
- Cars: Licensed in 2011, WA306
- Civil Servants from the Foyle Constituency who Work in Greater Belfast, WA96
- Civil Service: Posts, WA466–9
- Coastline: ASSI Designation, WA99
- Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises: DOE Spend, WA300
- Councils
 Capital Spend, WA118
 Community Planning Functions, WA114
 Debt, WA91
 Debt Reduction, WA298
 Domestic Local Rates/Non-domestic Local Rates, WA307–9
 General Grant, WA306–7
 Tendering Practices for Legal Services, WA483
 Written-off Debt, WA117–18
- Current/Capital Budget Allocation, WA120
- Cyclists
 Cross-departmental Policy, WA472
 Road Safety, WA309–10
 Safety from Lorries, WA471
- Cyclists and Pedestrians: Road Safety, WA471–2
- Dangerous Structures and Places Policy: Belfast City Council, WA99
- Detection Devices: Protected Sites, WA486
- Discharge Consents, WA483–4
- Dog Fouling
 Campaign, WA103
 Fines, WA103–4
- Driver and Vehicle Agency
 Coleraine Jobs, WA498
 Mobile Units, WA95
 Policy/Legislation Changes, WA100–1
 Release of Information, WA119
 Temporary Contracts, WA475–6
- Drivers: Licences Issued to those Aged Over 70, WA301
- Enforcement Cases: Lisburn, WA472–3
- Environmental Offences: Convictions, WA102
- Environmental Schemes, Projects and Initiatives: ROI Co-operation, WA286–297
- Equality Impact Assessments and Public Consultations: DOE Spend, WA470
- European Charter of Local Self-Government, WA298–9
- Flooding: Antrim and Randalstown Areas, WA116–17
- Genmar Companion
 Anchorage, WA93
 Debrief, WA114
 Oil Removal, WA92–3
- High Hedges Act (NI) 2011, WA121
- Historic Buildings: Targeted Surveys, WA301–2
- Historical Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995, WA112–3
- Hotels: Planning Applications, WA105–112
- Hydraulic Fracturing
 Environmental Impact, WA466
 Fermanagh Waterways, WA91
 NIEA Briefing, WA120
 NIEA Training, WA300
 Planning Applications, WA304–5, WA473
 Pollution of Waterways, WA297–8
 Public Inquiry, WA298
 Water Testing in Fermanagh, WA69–88
- Landfill
 Dargan Road, Belfast, WA305
 Treatment Capacities, WA305–6
- Landfill Tax: Beneficiaries, WA477–80
- Listed Buildings
 Ballymoney/Ballycastle/Ballymena, WA121
 North Down, WA302–3
- Littering: Fines, WA94–5
- Local Government
 15-council Model, WA91–2
 Reform, WA98
 Transfer of Functions, WA90
- Local Government Reform: Update, WA474
- Marine Bill: Management Issues, WA310
- MLAs: Remuneration, WA118
- Mobile Phone Applications, WA119
- MOT: Exemptions, WA482–3
- MOT Test: Changes, WA68–9
- National Park: Mourne, WA101
- Noise Complaints, WA94
- Northern Area Plan
 Development Framework, WA481
 Moyle, WA92, WA93
 Timescale, WA480–1
- Planning
 Application Backlog, WA496–7
 Article 31 Decisions, WA115
 Enforcement Action in Lisburn, WA99
 Enforcement Action in Downpatrick, WA100
 Fast Food Restaurants, WA101
 Replacement Home Approvals, WA102–3
 Planning Application A/2010/0493/F, WA483
 Planning Application B/2100/0057/F, WA118–19
 Planning Application E/2009/0303/O, WA93
 Planning Applications: Area of Special Scientific Interest, WA299–300
 Planning Applications G/2011/0041/F and G/2011/0162/F, WA96
 Planning Policy Statement 18, WA69, WA121
 Planning Policy Statement 21: Review, WA303, WA497
 Planning Policy Statements: Section 75 Screening, WA484–5
- Pollution: Croft Burn, WA304
- Postage and Printing Costs, WA469
- 'Protocol for the Care of the Historic Government Estate', WA310
- Renewable Energy: Planning Applications, WA68
- Restaurants and Bars: Disability Access, WA485
- Retail Planning Policy, WA470
- Review of Public Administration: Council Staff, WA116
- River Pollution, WA303–4
- Road Freight Operator Licences, WA301
- Roads: Oil Spills, WA115

Rose Energy
 Glenavy Incinerator, WA474
 Planning Application, WA497
 Sprucefield Centre Ltd: Planning Application, WA497–8
 Tamboran Resources Ltd: Planning Permission, WA115
 Taxi: Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles, WA90
 Taxis
 Belfast By-laws, WA482
 Central Station, Belfast, WA90–1
 Fares, WA481–2
 Intent of Single-tier System, WA482
 Licences in North Down, WA91
 Titanic Signature Project: Planning Permission, WA105
 Trade Union: Secondment, WA496
 Trade Union Duties, WA116
 Trade Unions: Funding, WA95
 Treasure, WA485
 Vehicle Tax: Roadside Checks, WA469
 Vehicles: Registration of Imports, WA101
 Water Pollution: Down Area, WA121–2
 Wildlife: Endangered Species, WA122–3
 Wind Farms: Planning Applications, WA96, WA481
 Wind Turbines
 Financial Benefits, WA497
 Planning Applications, WA89
 Revised Written Answers
 Environment
 Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan, RWA4

Beggs, Mr Roy

Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Rural Poverty, 65
 Employment and Learning
 Higher Education: Regional Colleges, 105
 Regional Development
 Cycling, 243
 Private Members' Business
 Indigenous Fish Stocks, 48–9, 49, 50
 Undeveloped Sites, 168–9, 169
 Welfare Reform, 32, 32–3, 33
 Written Answers
 Education
 Education and Skills Authority: Legislative Process, WA252
 Environment
 Planning: Replacement Home Approvals, WA102
 Regional Development
 Larne to Belfast Railway Line: Speed Restrictions, WA192
 Social Development
 Fuel Allowance Payments, WA210

Beggs, Mr Roy (as Deputy Speaker)

Adjournment
 Parkgate Quarry, County Antrim, 259
 Executive Committee Business
 Marine Bill [NIA 5/11-15]
 Second Stage, 183
 Ministerial Statements
 North/South Ministerial Council: Agriculture, 178, 179
 Oral Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24
 Education, 24, 26, 28

Private Members' Business
 Carjacking, 148, 152, 154, 155, 158, 159
 Decade of Centenaries, 111, 112, 114, 115, 116, 119
 Educational Assistance for Young People, 250
 Fairtrade Fortnight, 251, 253, 256, 259

Bell, Mr Jonathan

Oral Answers
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Barroso Task Force, 195, 195–6
 EU Commissioner for Research, Innovation and
 Science, 195, 195–6

Boylan, Mr Cathal

Executive Committee Business
 High Hedges (Fee Transfer) Regulations (Northern Ireland)
 2012, 213
 Marine Bill [NIA 5/11-15]
 Second Stage, 186–7
 Ministerial Statements
 Article 31 Planning Applications and Decisions, 144
 Oral Answers
 Environment
 Local Government Reform, 136
 Private Members' Business
 Undeveloped Sites, 163, 164
 Written Answers
 Employment and Learning
 Education Maintenance Allowance, WA266
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 HCL BPO Services: Job Losses, WA285
 Finance and Personnel
 Barnett Formula, WA331
 Justice
 Police Ombudsman: Interim Chief Executive, WA574

Boyle, Ms Michaela

Ministerial Statements
 North/South Ministerial Council: Health and Food Safety, 222
 Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Flood Prevention, 62
 Education
 Special Educational Needs, 28
 Written Answers
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Invest NI: Business Park, Melmount Road, Strabane,
 WA451
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Cancer
 Patient Data, WA145
 Support in Rural Areas, WA332
 Multiple System Atrophy, WA150
 Neurologists: Waiting Times, WA335
 Rare Diseases
 Definition, WA150
 Update, WA151
 Justice
 Strabane Courthouse
 DDA Compliance, WA540
 Recommended Works, WA537
 Regional Development
 Sewer Flooding: Ballycolman Estate, Strabane, WA192

Social Development
 Employment and Support Allowance: Appeal Rate, WA604
 Housing: Waiting Lists in Strabane and Omagh, WA384

Bradley, Mr Dominic

Executive Committee Business
 Budget Bill [NIA 4/11-15]
 Final Stage, 91–2, 96
 Ministerial Statements
 Article 31 Planning Applications and Decisions, 146
 North/South Ministerial Council
 Languages, 86
 Waterways, 84
 Oral Answers
 Finance and Personnel
 Businesses: Tax Liabilities, 138
 Written Answers
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 HCL BPO Services, WA67
 Environment
 Driver and Vehicle Agency: Release of Information, WA119

Bradley, Ms Paula

Ministerial Statements
 North/South Ministerial Council: Health and Food Safety, 221
 Oral Answers
 Education
 North Eastern Education and Library Board: Youth
 Services, 27
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Suicide Prevention Implementation Group, 197
 Private Members' Business
 Emergency Life Support Skills, 11–12, 12
 Organ Donation, 75

Brady, Mr Mickey

Executive Committee Business
 Pensions Bill [NIA 3/11-15]
 Committee Stage, CS2, CS3
 Social Security (Loss of Benefit) (Amendment) Regulations
 (Northern Ireland) 2011, 6, 7
 Ministerial Statements
 North/South Ministerial Council: Health and Food Safety, 221
 Oral Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Ulster Canal, 21, 22
 Private Members' Business
 Emergency Life Support Skills, 12–13
 Organ Donation, 69, 69–70, 72
 Welfare Reform, 29, 30
 Written Answers
 Justice
 Police Service: Enhanced Severance Payments, WA575

Buchanan, Mr Thomas

Ministerial Statements
 North/South Ministerial Council: Agriculture, 179
 Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland and Employer
 Engagement Plan, 224
 Written Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Single Farm Payments, WA7

Sperrin House, Omagh: Lease, WA232
 Employment and Learning
 ApprenticeshipsNI, WA48
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Cancer: Care and Treatment of Children and Young
 People, WA343
 Northern Ireland Cancer Network: Workplan, WA343

Byrne, Mr Joe

Adjournment
 Home Help Services: County Fermanagh, 77
 Ministerial Statements
 Article 31 Planning Applications and Decisions, 147
 North/South Ministerial Council: Health and Food Safety, 221
 Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland and Employer
 Engagement Plan, 227
 Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Flood Prevention, 62
 Education
 Minister for Education and Skills, 26
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Unemployment, 105
 Environment
 Allotments, 135
 Finance and Personnel
 Government Assets, 137
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Omagh Enhanced Local Hospital, 200
 Justice
 Rural Crime, 240
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 FM/DFM: Foreign Direct Investment, 59
 Regional Development
 Conservation: Traffic Restrictions, 241
 Private Members' Business
 Decade of Centenaries, 111
 Indigenous Fish Stocks, 49, 49–50
 Welfare Reform, 34

Campbell, Mr Gregory

Executive Committee Business
 Department of Justice, 123, 129, 130
 Marine Bill [NIA 5/11-15]
 Second Stage, 202
 Social Security (Loss of Benefit) (Amendment) Regulations
 (Northern Ireland) 2011, 4–5, 7
 Ministerial Statements
 North/South Ministerial Council: Health and Food Safety, 222
 Oral Answers
 Employment and Learning
 DEL: Dissolution, 102
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Unemployment, 105
 Justice
 Prisons: Full-body Searches, 237
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Victims and Survivors Service, 193
 Private Members' Business
 Organ Donation, 55
 Revised Written Answers
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Payment of Invoices: 10-day Target, RWA4

Written Answers

- Agriculture and Rural Development
 - Schmallenberg Virus, WA397
- Employment and Learning
 - Tourism and Hospitality: Vocational Courses, WA266
- Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Tourism: Londonderry Quay, WA66
- Finance and Personnel
 - Civil Service: Administrative Officer Posts, WA128
- Justice
 - Marian Price: Move to Hydebank Wood, WA178
 - TV Licence: Convictions, WA170
- Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 - Ballykelly Army Base: Costs, WA223
- Social Development
 - Housing Executive: Recruitment, WA366
 - Social Security (Loss of Benefit) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011, WA385

Clarke, Mr Trevor

- Adjournment
 - Parkgate Quarry, County Antrim, 260–1, 261, 264
- Ministerial Statements
 - North/South Ministerial Council: Agriculture, 179
- Oral Answers
 - Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 - Foreign Direct Investment, 193, 194
- Written Answers
 - Agriculture and Rural Development
 - Flooding, WA17
 - Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 - Bronchial Challenge Test, WA138
 - Regional Development
 - Level Crossings
 - Safety at Skeganeagh, WA189
 - Unmanned Gates, WA182
 - Social Development
 - Boiler Replacement Scheme, WA210

Clarke, Mr Willie

- Executive Committee Business
 - Marine Bill [NIA 5/11-15]
 - Second Stage, 191
- Oral Answers
 - Environment
 - Allotments, 135
- Revised Written Answers
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Invest NI Funding, RWA1
- Written Answers
 - Culture, Arts and Leisure
 - Cultural Tourism Potential: South Down, WA402
 - Oscars Success: 'The Shore', WA405
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Broadband Access: Rural Areas, WA269
 - Invest NI: Funding in South Down, WA456
 - Renewable Energy Targets: Assistance, WA57
 - Finance and Personnel
 - Businesses: South Down, WA504
 - Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 - Fire Station: Newcastle, WA515
 - Job Losses: South Down, WA346
 - Justice
 - Prisoners: Dissident Republicans, WA574

Cochrane, Mrs Judith

- Adjournment
 - Children and Young People with Cancer: East Belfast, 171–2
- Executive Committee Business
 - Social Security (Loss of Benefit) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011, 5–6
- Oral Answers
 - Education
 - Preschool Admissions: Criteria, 25
 - Private Members' Business
 - Welfare Reform, 31
- Revised Written Answers
 - Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 - Cyberknife Stereotactic Body Radiotherapy, RWA4
- Written Answers
 - Agriculture and Rural Development
 - Flooding: South and East Belfast, WA241
 - Education
 - Home to School Transport Scheme
 - Eligibility, WA254
 - Private Buses, WA254
 - School Transport
 - Private Buses on Unserviced Routes, WA255
 - Special Educational Needs Provision, WA255
 - Schools: Asbestos, WA420, WA421
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Invest NI: Go For It Programme, WA281
 - Environment
 - 160-220 Castlereagh Road, Belfast: Planning
 - Permission, WA484
 - Social Development
 - Business Improvement Districts, WA619

Copeland, Mr Michael

- Adjournment
 - Children and Young People with Cancer: East Belfast, 172–3
- Executive Committee Business
 - Pensions Bill [NIA 3/11-15]
 - Committee Stage, CS3
 - Social Security (Loss of Benefit) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011, 5
- Oral Answers
 - Justice
 - Multiagency Risk Assessment Conferences Operational Group, 239
 - Regional Development
 - Street Lighting Cables, 241
- Private Members' Business
 - Fairtrade Fortnight, 254–5
 - Welfare Reform, 30, 31
- Written Answers
 - Employment and Learning
 - Current/Capital Budget Allocation, WA47
 - Environment
 - Current/Capital Budget Allocation, WA120
 - Local Government: Transfer of Functions, WA89
 - Titanic Signature Project: Planning Permission, WA104
 - Finance and Personnel
 - Energy Efficiency Certificates: Public Buildings, WA311
 - Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 - Hospitals: Retail Outlets, WA339
 - Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, WA533
 - Social Development
 - Benefits: Over £26,000, WA207

Crisis Loans, WA195
 Disability Living Allowance
 Alcohol/Drug Addiction, WA604
 Alcoholics, WA384

Craig, Mr Jonathan

Oral Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Ulster Scots: Ministerial Advisory Group, 23
 Private Members' Business
 Carjacking, 158
 Educational Assistance for Young People, 250, 250–1
 Written Answers
 Education
 Teachers: Redundancy or Early Retirement Packages,
 WA416
 Employment and Learning
 Academic Underachievement, WA264
 Environment
 Dangerous Structures and Places Policy: Belfast City
 Council, WA99
 Enforcement Cases: Lisburn, WA472
 Planning
 Enforcement Action in Downpatrick, WA100
 Enforcement Action in Lisburn, WA99
 Regional Development
 Hillhall Road, Lisburn, WA579
 Salt: Roads Service Stock, WA182
 Social Development
 Disability Living Allowance: Welfare Reform Changes,
 WA207

Cree, Mr Leslie

Executive Committee Business
 Budget Bill [NIA 4/11-15]
 Final Stage, 91, 94
 Official Statistics Order (Northern Ireland) 2012, 42
 Ministerial Statements
 Article 31 Planning Applications and Decisions, 145
 Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Animal Welfare: Slaughterhouses, 64
 Employment and Learning
 DEL: Dissolution, 101, 102
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Community Pharmacists, 199
 Written Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Fishing: Lough Neagh, WA27
 Justice
 National Crime Agency, WA576

Dallat, Mr John

Executive Committee Business
 High Hedges (Fee Transfer) Regulations (Northern Ireland)
 2012, 213–14
 Marine Bill [NIA 5/11-15]
 Second Stage, 189–90
 Ministerial Statements
 Article 31 Planning Applications and Decisions, 144–5
 North/South Ministerial Council: Agriculture, 179
 Oral Answers, 201

Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Fishing Rights, 21
 Environment
 Association of British Insurers, 133–4
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 EU Commissioner for Research, Innovation and
 Science, 194, 195
 Private Members' Business
 Fairtrade Fortnight, 255–6, 256, 258
 Undeveloped Sites, 164, 165
 Written Answers
 Education
 Education and Library Board: Staff Contact with Pupils,
 WA427
 Garvagh High School, Coleraine, WA428
 Pupils: Not Achieving GCSEs, WA427
 Environment
 Driver and Vehicle Agency
 Coleraine Jobs, WA498
 Temporary Contracts, WA475
 Landfill Tax: Beneficiaries, WA477
 Roads: Oil Spills, WA115
 Finance and Personnel
 Civil Service: Vacancies, WA125
 External Consultants: Guidelines, WA130
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Causeway Hospital, Coleraine: Viability, WA526
 Justice
 Prisoners: Literacy and Numeracy, WA545
 Regional Development
 Manholes: Theft, WA581
 Street Lights: Theft, WA580
 Water Leakage, WA599
 Social Development
 Volunteer Centres: Protective Notice, WA198

Dallat, Mr John (as Deputy Speaker)

Adjournment
 Children and Young People with Cancer: East Belfast, 171
 Assembly Business
 Statutory Committee Membership, 89
 Executive Committee Business
 Budget Bill [NIA 4/11-15]
 Final Stage, 97
 Ministerial Statements
 North/South Ministerial Council: Languages, 88
 Oral Answers
 Justice, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240
 Regional Development, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244
 Private Members' Business
 Decade of Centenaries, 98, 100
 Educational Assistance for Young People, 245, 246, 247
 Indigenous Fish Stocks, 49, 50, 54
 Organ Donation, 55, 56, 57
 Welfare Reform, 30, 31, 33, 35, 36, 37, 38

Dickson, Mr Stewart

Executive Committee Business
 Department of Justice, 128
 Ministerial Statements
 Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland and Employer
 Engagement Plan, 225

Oral Answers

- Employment and Learning
 - DEL: Programme for Government and Economic Strategy, 102, 103
- Regional Development
 - Cycling, 243

Private Members' Business

- Educational Assistance for Young People, 249–50

Written Answers

- Environment
 - Councils: Tendering Practices for Legal Services, WA483
 - Marine Bill: Management Issues, WA310
- Justice
 - Prisoners: Management of Separated Inmates, WA154
- Regional Development
 - Flags and Emblems: Protocol, WA601
- Social Development
 - ReStore Programme, Carrickfergus: Funding, WA383

Dobson, Mrs Jo-Anne

Ministerial Statements

- North/South Ministerial Council: Agriculture, 178

Oral Answers

- Agriculture and Rural Development
 - Broadband: Rural Areas, 63
- Culture, Arts and Leisure
 - Ulster Scots: Ministerial Advisory Group, 23

Education

- Preschool Admissions: Criteria, 25

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

- Invest NI: Business Loans Scheme, 106

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

- Barroso Task Force, 194, 195

Private Members' Business

- Organ Donation, 67, 67–8

Written Answers

- Agriculture and Rural Development
 - Forestry Service: Leases, WA233
 - Postgraduate Studentship, WA392, WA393
 - Schmallenberg Virus, WA235, WA236
 - Sheep/Cattle Imports, WA390
 - Stewardship Areas: DARD Funding, WA240
 - Tuberculosis: Cattle, WA241
 - Veterinary Work: Private Arrangements, WA235–6, WA236
- Education
 - Community Use of School Premises, WA424
 - Literacy and Numeracy Co-ordinators: Qualifications, WA253
 - Statement of Special Educational Needs: Support, WA30
- Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Orange Events: NITB Funding, WA464–5
- Justice
 - Crime Prevention Methods and Reporting Incidents of Crime, WA171
 - Prosecution: Alternatives, WA573

Doherty, Mr Pat

Oral Answers

- Justice
 - Prisons: Full-body Searches, 236, 237
- Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 - A5 Dual Carriageway, 61

Douglas, Mr Sammy

Adjournment

- Children and Young People with Cancer: East Belfast, 172

Ministerial Statements

- Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland and Employer Engagement Plan, 226

Oral Answers

Environment

- Local Government Reform, 136
- Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 - EU Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science, 195

Private Members' Business

- Decade of Centenaries, 115, 116
- Educational Assistance for Young People, 234–5, 235
- Welfare Reform, 36, 36–7, 37

Dunne, Mr Gordon

Ministerial Statement

- North/South Ministerial Council: Health and food Safety, 220

Oral Answers

- Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 - Belfast City Hospital, 198

Private Members' Business

- Emergency Life Support Skills, 13
- Organ Donation, 69

Written Answers

- Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - North/South Electricity Interconnector, WA442
- Environment
 - Cyclists: Road Safety, WA309
- Landfill
 - Dargan Road, Belfast, WA305
 - Treatment Capacities, WA305
 - Wind Turbines: Planning Applications, WA88
- Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 - Rare Diseases, WA529
- Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 - Social Investment Fund: Implementation Process, WA225
- Regional Development
 - Cycle Lanes: North Down, WA578
 - Cyclists: North Down, WA578
- Social Development
 - Fuel Allowance Payment: North Down, WA607

Durkan, Mr Mark

Executive Committee Business

- Social Security (Loss of Benefit) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011, 5

Ministerial Statements

- North/South Ministerial Council: Health and Food Safety, 220–1, 221

Oral Answers

- Agriculture and Rural Development
 - Rural Poverty, 65
- Education
 - North Eastern Education and Library Board: Youth Services, 27
- Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 - Race Relations, 61
- Private Members' Business
 - Emergency Life Support Skills, 10–11
 - Organ Donation, 56–7

Welfare Reform, 17–18
 Written Answers
 Education
 Woodlands Language Unit, Derry, WA30
 Closure, WA30
 Finance and Personnel
 Unemployment: Belfast/Armagh/Derry, WA131
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Accident and Emergency: Average Waiting Times, WA342
 Blood: Received in Northern Ireland, WA341
 Business Services Organisation
 Correspondence Requests, WA345
 Staffing Issues, WA345
 Community Meals, WA341
 Dental Remuneration: Practice Allowance, WA341–2,
 WA342
 Dental Services: Practice Allowance, WA534
 Malnutrition: Older People, WA509
 NICE Technology Appraisals/Clinical Guidelines,
 WA527, WA530
 Stereotactic Ablative Radiotherapy, WA141
 Justice
 Antisocial Behaviour: Foyle, WA576
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Social Protection Fund: Fuel Poverty, WA213
 Social Development
 Advice Services: Funding, WA386
 Boiler Replacement Scheme, WA619
 Capital Projects: Foyle, WA618
 Housing Executive Properties: Newbuilds in Derry, WA618
 Income Support: Belfast/Derry/Armagh, WA199

Easton, Mr Alex

Private Members' Business
 Educational Assistance for Young People, 230–1
 Welfare Reform, 18, 18–19
 Written Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Equality Impact Assessments/Consultations: DARD
 Spend, WA13
 EU Funding: Amount Surrendered, WA231
 Fertilisers: Cost to Farmers, WA8
 Trees: North Down, WA9
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Equality Impact Assessments and Consultations: DCAL
 Spend, WA242
 Education
 Academic Selection, WA36
 Grants, WA248
 Primary School: Compulsory Starting Age, WA28
 Schools: Closure Criteria, WA34
 Teachers: Recruitment when Newly Qualified, WA31
 Employment and Learning
 Apprenticeships
 Public Sector, WA50
 South Eastern Regional College, WA52
 Capital Building Programme, WA256
 Queens University Belfast and Stranmillis University
 College: Proposed Merger, WA47
 Stranmillis University College
 Board of Governors, WA51
 Financial Position, WA256
 Surplus Land or Buildings, WA262

Universities: Foreign Students, WA46
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Renewable Energy Targets: Assistance, WA54
 Environment
 Cars: Licensed in 2011, WA306
 Equality Impact Assessments and Public Consultations:
 DOE Spend, WA470
 High Hedges Act (NI) 2011, WA121
 Listed Buildings: North Down, WA302
 Littering: Fines, WA94
 Noise Complaints, WA94
 Retail Planning Policy, WA470
 Taxis: Licences in North Down, WA91
 Wildlife: Endangered Species, WA122
 Finance and Personnel
 Elderly Population: North Down, WA131
 Fuel Smuggling, WA325
 Job Losses: Construction Industry, WA133
 Unemployment: Holywood Electoral Area, WA314
 Justice
 Prisoners
 Educational Programmes, WA166
 Paid Jobs, WA167
 Privileges, WA168
 Recreational Programmes, WA166
 Visiting Rights, WA168
 Prison Service: Lisnevin Site, WA575
 Regional Development
 Equality Impact Assessments and Public Consultations:
 DRD Spend, WA577
 Parking: Priors Lea, Holywood, WA356
 Rathgael Road, Bangor: Weight Restriction, WA190
 Road and Footpath Schemes: Groomsport, WA181
 Roads: Spend in Donaghadee, WA356
 Street Lighting Schemes: Bangor, WA181
 Traffic Calming Schemes: North Down, WA190
 Train Halt: George Best Belfast City Airport/Ikea, WA182
 Social Development
 Equality Impact Assessments/Consultations: DSD
 Spend, WA377
 Housing Executive Properties: Millisle, WA208
 Housing: Harbour Ward, Bangor, WA369

Eastwood, Mr Colum

Executive Committee Business
 Budget Bill [NIA 4/11-15]
 Final Stage, 92–3
 Department of Justice, 128
 Oral Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 DCAL: Cohesion, Sharing and Integration, 23
 Employment and Learning
 Youth Unemployment, 101
 Finance and Personnel
 Public Sector Jobs, 139
 Justice
 Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005, 238
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Strategic Investment Board, 57
 Victims and Survivors Service, 193
 Regional Development
 Street Lighting Cables, 241

Private Members' Business
 Carjacking, 151
 Fairtrade Fortnight, 255
 Revised Written Answers
 Regional Development
 Number of Civil Service Posts in Department, RWA5
 Written Answers
 Assembly Commission
 Printer Ink Cartridges: Procurement, WA621
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Brandywell Stadium, Derry: Upgrade, WA402
 Civil Service: Posts, WA246
 Cultural Infrastructure: DCAL Spend, WA244
 Soccer: Capital Investment in Brandywell Stadium, WA247
 Education
 Bunscoil Cholmcille, Derry: Funding Applications, WA33
 Employment and Learning
 Civil Service: Posts, WA47–8
 Universities: Applications, WA266
 Veterinary Medicine: Degree Courses, WA260
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Bed and Breakfasts: Incentives, WA272
 Broadband
 Speed, WA280
 Speed of Access, WA282
 Civil Service: Posts, WA282
 Economic Activity: Derry, WA281
 Energy Prices
 Affordability, WA276
 Incentives/Penalties, WA277
 Increases, WA437, WA438, WA441
 Tariffs, WA276
 'NI 2012: Our Place, Our Time', WA272
 Winning in Europe: European Priorities 2011-12, WA270
 Environment
 Civil Service: Posts, WA466
 Finance and Personnel
 Civil Service: Posts, WA312
 Employment
 District Council Areas, WA501
 Public Sector, WA502
 Gross Domestic Product, WA504
 Mortgage and Debt Arrears, WA134
 Rating: Vacant Industrial/Non-domestic Properties, WA500
 Social Clauses: Job Creation, WA498
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Civil Service: Posts, WA136
 Complementary and Alternate Medicines Pilot Project, WA336
 Stereotactic Ablative Radiotherapy, WA533
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Arm's-length Bodies, WA6
 Capital Realisations: Money Generated, WA223
 Children and Young People's Strategy, WA5
 Civil Service: Posts, WA4, WA13
 Commissioner for Public Appointments: Remit, WA222
 Illex: Regeneration Projects, WA2
 Regional Development
 A6: Derry to Dungiven Project, WA361
 Belfast to Derry Railway Line: Passenger Numbers, WA191
 Bus Routes: Derry to Dublin, WA582
 Civil Service: Posts, WA179
 TEN-T Network: Core Node, WA580

Social Development
 Civil Service: Posts, WA197
 Decent Homes Standard, WA606
 Economy 7 Heating, WA602
Elliott, Mr Tom
 Adjournment
 Home Help Services: County Fermanagh, 76–7
 Executive Committee Business
 Department of Justice, 123–4, 124, 129
 Ministerial Statements
 North/South Ministerial Council: Waterways, 84
 Oral Answers
 Justice
 Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005, 238
 Written Answers
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Airlines: International Carriers, WA433
 Foreign Direct Investment, WA64
 HCL BPO Services, WA463
 Tourism Ireland
 Northern Ireland Contribution, WA63
 Funding, WA271–2
 Environment
 Planning Policy Statement 21: Review, WA303
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Home Start: Funding, WA136
 Nursing Care: Cost, WA146
 Social Care: Residential Homes, WA514
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Strategic Support Funding 2012-13, WA5
Farry, Dr Stephen
 Executive Committee Business
 Labour Relations Agency Code of Practice on Time Off for
 Trade Union Duties and Activities, 228–9, 229
 Ministerial Statements
 Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland and Employer
 Engagement Plan, 222–4, 224–5, 225, 225–6, 226,
 227, 228
 Oral Answers
 Employment and Learning
 DEL
 Dissolution, 101–2, 102
 Programme for Government and Economic Strategy,
 102–3, 103
 Higher Education: Regional Colleges, 104, 104–5, 105
 Universities Ireland, 103–4, 104
 Youth Unemployment, 101
 Private Members' Business
 Educational Assistance for Young People, 233, 247–8,
 248–9
 Written Answers
 Employment and Learning
 Academic Underachievement, WA264–5
 ApprenticeshipsNI, WA48–9
 Apprenticeships, WA264
 Public Sector, WA50
 South Eastern Regional College, WA52–3
 Architecture Graduates: Employment, WA260
 Bachelor of Education: UCAS Points, WA256–7
 Belfast Metropolitan College: Former Premises, WA52
 Capital Building Programme, WA256

Care Leavers
 Career Opportunities, WA50
 Specialist Employment Schemes, WA49
 Certificate of Religious Education, WA51, WA263
 Civil Service: Posts, WA48
 Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises:
 DEL Spend, WA259–260
 Current/Capital Budget Allocation, WA47
 Education Maintenance Allowance, WA267
 Engineering Graduates: Employment, WA258–9
 Equality Unit, WA48
 Fuel: DEL Spend, WA53
 Further and Higher Education
 All-Ireland Applications, WA429
 Cross-border Study, WA429–431
 Hospitality
 Skills, WA264
 Spend, WA51
 Human Resources, WA51
 Investors in People: East Londonderry, WA265
 Law Graduates: Employment, WA257–8
 Medical Graduates: Employment, WA261–2
 North West Regional College: Redundancies, WA431
 Nursing Graduates: Employment, WA262–3
 Postage and Printing Costs, WA263
 Queens University Belfast and Stranmillis University
 College: Proposed Merger, WA47, WA265, WA267,
 WA429
 Questions for Written Answer: Stationery Costs, WA52
 Recruitment Agencies: DEL Spend, WA48
 South Eastern Regional College: Applications, WA267
 South West Regional College: Beacon Awards, WA267–8
 Step Ahead, WA53
 Steps to Work: Employment, WA52
 St Mary's University College: Positive Discrimination,
 WA258
 Stranmillis University College
 Board of Governors, WA51
 Financial Position, WA256
 Staff Meeting, WA51
 Students
 Cross-border Study, WA429
 Maintenance Loans for Irish Passport Holders, WA259
 Surplus Land or Buildings, WA262
 Teacher Education Infrastructure, WA431
 Teachers
 English at Post-primary Level, WA52
 STEM Subjects, WA50
 Tourism and Hospitality: Vocational Courses, WA266
 Universities
 Application, WA266
 Foreign Students, WA46–7
 Veterinary Medicine: Degree Courses, WA260
 Welfare Reform Programme, WA428

Flanagan, Mr Phil

Adjournment
 Home Help Services: County Fermanagh, 76
 Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Broadband: Rural Areas, 62, 63
 Written Answers
 Agriculture and rural Development
 DARD Jobs: Enniskillen, WA396

Assembly Commission
 Parliament Buildings
 Heating and Electricity, WA211
 Video-conferencing Facilities, WA386–7
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Angling Licences
 Attracting Visitors, WA404
 Granted to Visitors, WA404
 Enniskillen Library: Refurbishment, WA24
 Rugby World Cup 2023, WA404
 Education
 Pupils: Travel to School Time, WA43
 Employment and Learning
 Further and Higher Education
 All-Ireland Applications, WA429
 Cross-border Study, WA429
 Students: Cross-border Study, WA429
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Agrifood Sector: Employment, WA433
 Business Start-up Programme
 GO Group, WA64
 Tender Process, WA57–8
 Fibre Optic Cable: Monaghan, Cavan and Enniskillen, WA54
 Fracking: Chemical Use, WA274
 Invest NI
 Boosting Business Initiative, WA283
 Start-up Scheme, WA270–1, WA271
 'Our Time, Our Place': Funding, WA437
 Overseas Visitors, WA447
 PROGRESS Micro-finance Scheme, WA443
 Rugby World Cup 2023, WA461
 Shale Gas: County Fermanagh, WA274–5, WA283
 Shale Gas Forum, WA274
 Single Electricity Market, WA436
 Smart Meters, WA53
 Strategic Energy Framework, WA280
 Tourism: Fermanagh, WA66–7
 Environment
 Planning Applications: Area of Special Scientific
 Interest, WA299
 Planning Policy Statement 18, WA121
 Review of Public Administration: Council Staff, WA116
 Finance and Personnel
 Block Grant, WA505
 Car-charging Units: Stormont Estate, WA499
 Contracts: Central Procurement Directorate, WA499
 Rating: Non-domestic System, WA504
 Renewable Energy: Stormont Estate, WA499
 Research and Development
 Industry Spend, WA328
 Percentage of GDP, WA328
 Top 20 Investors, WA328
 Stormont Estate: Entrance Security, WA316
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Dental Services: County Fermanagh, WA516
 Hospital: Enniskillen, WA515
 Hospitals: Newbuild in Enniskillen, WA141–2
 Regional Development
 NSL Services Group: Funding, WA584
 Parking
 Private Car Park Fines, WA357
 Private Car Park Regulation, WA357

Rail Network: Expansion to Fermanagh and Tyrone, WA362
 Unadopted Roads: County Fermanagh, WA359
 Plugged-in Places Scheme, WA587

Ford, Mr David

Adjournment

Parkgate Quarry, County Antrim, 262–3, 263

Oral Answers

Justice

Multiagency Risk Assessment Conferences Operational Group, 238–9, 239
 Prisons: Full-body Searches, 236–7, 237
 Prison Service: Enhanced Severance, 236
 PSNI: Managed Services Contract, 237, 237–8, 238
 Rural Crime, 239, 240
 Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005, 238

Private Members' Business

Carjacking, 156–7, 157, 157–8
 Fairtrade Fortnight, 253, 259

Written Answers

Justice

Antisocial Behaviour: Foyle, WA576–7
 Anti-social Behaviour Orders: North Down, WA556
 Barry Johnston, WA164, WA164–5
 Bench Warrants, WA165
 Case Number 12/20314, WA178, WA351
 Child Abduction: Convictions, WA350–1
 Colin Bell: Death in Custody, WA154, WA161, WA163
 Compensation: Major Incident Claims, WA163–4
 Computer Hacking, WA164
 Community Safety Strategy
 Priorities, WA572
 Success, WA557
 Update, WA557
 Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises:
 DOJ Spend, WA169
 Contraband: Roe House, HMP Maghaberry, WA177
 Convictions: Unspent, WA171
 Court Cases: Taxing Master, WA570–1
 Courthouse Closures
 Consultation, WA571
 Costs Incurred by Defendants, WA165
 Financial Impact, WA552
 Impact on Legal Aid, WA552
 Impact on Transport Costs, WA162, WA570
 Impact on Travel Costs, WA549, WA552
 Courthouses: Antisocial Behaviour, WA348
 Crime Prevention Methods and Reporting Incidents of Crime, WA171–6
 Crimestoppers: Funding, WA557
 Criminal Record Regime: Review, WA178
 Disabled Car Parking Bays: Misuse, WA554
 Drink Driving: Convictions, WA553–4
 Driving Offences
 Drink, WA159
 Drink or Drugs, WA159
 Drugs: Couriers, WA152–3
 Enniskillen Courthouse: Double Yellow Lines, WA171
 Fuel: DOJ Spend, WA169
 Historic Crimes: Amnesty, WA170–1
 HMP Maghaberry
 Full Body Searching, WA569

Pearson Recommendations, WA551
 Proposed Bowling Green, WA349
 Unannounced Visits, WA537
 Human Resources, WA162
 Judicial Review: Legal Costs, WA548
 Kanram Jafar: Release from HMP Maghaberry, WA347
 Lawyers: Mileage Claims, WA158
 Legal Aid:
 12 July 2011 Public Order Offences, WA347
 Occupy Belfast, WA570
 Life Sentences (Northern Ireland) Order 2001, WA552
 Marian Price
 Accommodation at Hydebank Wood, WA536, WA537
 Move to Hydebank Wood, WA177–8, WA178
 Security at Hydebank Wood, WA349
 National Crime Agency, WA576
 Neighbourhood Watch Schemes: Funding, WA557–569
 Non-jury Trials: Cost, WA569
 Police: Part-time Reserve Gratuity Scheme, WA158
 Police Ombudsman: Interim Chief Executive, WA574
 Police Service: Enhanced Severance Payments, WA575
 Policing and Community Safety Partnerships:
 Independent Members, WA347, WA349–350, WA543–4
 Postage and Printing Costs, WA537
 Prisoner Assessment Unit
 Failings, WA162
 Staff, WA177
 Prisoners
 Category A, WA552, WA555
 Death by Suicide, WA161, WA163
 Dissident Republicans, WA574–5
 Drug Use, WA164
 Educational Programmes, WA166
 Forensic Psychologist Assessments, WA162
 Literacy and Numeracy, WA545–6
 Management of Separated Inmates, WA154–8
 Offensive Weapons, WA165
 Paid Jobs, WA167–8
 Privileges, WA168
 Recreational Programmes, WA166–7
 Visiting Rights, WA168–9
 Prison Governors: Suspension, WA555
 Prison Officers
 Suicide Watch Training, WA161
 Training for Night Custody Duties, WA160
 Prisons
 Ministerial Visits, WA348
 Searching Practices, WA536
 Speech and Language Therapists, WA158–9
 Prison Service
 Artefacts, WA545
 Board Members, WA550
 Exit Scheme, WA570, WA573, WA576
 Lisnevin Site, WA575
 Pearson Review, WA549
 Principal Officer Grade, WA177
 Private Investigators, WA556
 Senior Management, WA575
 Trust Support, WA551
 Trust Volunteers, WA551
 Prison Service Staff
 Disciplinary Actions or Investigations, WA535–6
 Driving Without Insurance, WA547

Suspended from Duty, WA154
 Private Investigators
 DOJ Usage, WA169
 Prison Service Usage, WA170
 Prosecution: Alternatives, WA573–4
 Public Order Offences: 12 July 2011, WA170
 Recruitment Agencies: DOJ Spend, WA153–4
 Ronnie Graham
 Psychiatric Assessment, WA555
 Release from Custody, WA549
 Sexual Offenders Treatment Programme, WA569
 RUC George Cross Foundation Regulations 2002,
 WA569–570
 Rural Communities: Safety, WA572, WA573
 Rural White Paper, WA571
 Safer Custody Project, WA348
 Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005, WA548–9
 Sexual Abuse: Members of the Clergy, WA549
 Sexual Offender Treatment Programme, WA152
 Relapses, WA547
 Small Claims Court
 Advice, WA547
 Appeals, WA548
 Speeding up Justice Branch, WA554–5
 Sobriety Tags, WA177
 Strabane Courthouse
 DDA Compliance, WA540–3
 Recommended Works, WA537–540
 Summons Cases: Performance, WA170
 Summonses: Costs, WA176
 Supergrass Trial: Cost, WA576
 Trade Union
 Funding, WA551
 Secondment, WA555–6
 Trevor Bailie: Legal Aid Costs, WA349
 TV Licence: Convictions, WA170

Foster, Mrs Arlene

Executive Committee Business
 Public Bodies (Abolition of the National Endowment for
 Science, Technology and the Arts) Order 2012, 215–16, 217
 Oral Answers
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Creative Industries, 107–8, 108
 Go For It Programme, 109
 Hydraulic Fracturing: North Coast, 107
 Invest NI: Business Loans Scheme, 106, 107
 Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs): South
 Antrim, 108, 109
 Unemployment, 105, 106
 Private Members' Business
 Decade of Centenaries, 116–18
 Fairtrade Fortnight, 256–7, 257
 Revised Written Answers
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Invest NI Funding, RWA1
 Written Answers
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Agrifood Sector: Employment, WA433–6
 Airlines: International Carriers, WA433
 Anaerobic Digesters and Wind Turbines: Funding, WA453
 Bed and Breakfasts: Incentives, WA272–3

Broadband
 Access: Rural Areas, WA269
 Services, WA459
 Speed, WA280
 Speed of Access, WA282
 Business Start-up Programme
 Advice and Support, WA461
 GO Group, WA64
 Interested Parties, WA461
 KPMG Payment, WA56
 Tender Process, WA55, WA58, WA453
 Civil Service
 Posts, WA283
 Tender guidelines, WA433
 Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises:
 DETI Spend, WA437
 Construction Industry, WA269–270
 Creative Industries: Invest NI Funding, WA59–61
 Credit Easing: Small and Medium-sized Enterprises,
 WA284, WA285
 Credit Unions, WA285
 Digital Hub: Belfast, WA439
 Economic Activity: Derry, WA281
 Economic Activity Rate, WA439
 Electricity Prices, WA268
 Emigration: 2010/2011/2012, WA275–6
 Employment Opportunities, WA284–5
 Employment: People without Qualifications, WA448–9
 Electricity and Gas Prices: Green Policies, WA447–8
 Electricity: Renewable Sources, WA462
 Energy Prices
 Affordability, WA276
 Impact on Low Income Families, WA65
 Incentives/Penalties, WA277
 Increases, WA437–8, WA438, WA441
 Tariffs, WA276–7
 Energy Provision, WA54
 Enterprise Development Programme
 Delivery Costs, WA460
 KPMG Payment, WA56
 KPMG Role, WA55
 Equality Unit, WA62
 Ferry Prices, WA63
 Ferry Services: Prices, WA464
 Fibre Optic Cable: Monaghan, Cavan and Enniskillen, WA54
 Foreign Direct Investment, WA64
 Fracking: Chemical Use, WA274
 Fuel
 DETI Spend, WA67
 Regional Pricing, WA275
 Geothermal Energy: Legislative Framework, WA443
 Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre, WA284
 Go For It Programme, WA268
 HCL BPO Services, WA67–8, WA463
 Job Losses, WA285
 Home Heating Oil Suppliers: Customer Charter, WA463
 Home Heating Oil: Retail Pump Sales, WA449–450
 Hotels: Capital Grants, WA65–6
 Hydraulic Fracturing
 Climate Change, WA450, WA450–1
 County Fermanagh, WA451
 Petroleum Licences, WA440, WA445–6, WA446

Invest NI

Boosting Business Initiative, WA283
 Business Park, Melmount Road, Strabane, WA451
 Funding, RWA1–3
 Funding in South Down, WA456–8
 Go For It Programme, WA273, WA281
 Job Promotion, WA277–280
 Land, WA62
 Land for Economic Development, WA58–9
 Start-up Scheme, WA271
 Stakeholder Perceptions, WA464
 Use of Consultants, WA459–460
 Job Creation: North Antrim, WA452
 Natural Gas
 Availability, WA453–4, WA455
 Extension of Network to Ballycastle, WA459
 Prices, WA455
 Uptake, WA454–5, WA455
 ‘NI 2012: Our Place, Our Time’, WA272
 Northern Workforce Development Forum: Ballymena, WA444–5
 North/South Electricity Interconnector, WA280, WA281, WA442, WA445, WA451
 Nuclear Power: Local Facility, WA459
 Orange Events: NITB Funding, WA465
 ‘Our Time, Our Place’ Initiative, WA57
 Funding, WA437
 Orange Events, WA432
 Sporting Organisations, WA465
 Overseas Visitors, WA447
 Petroleum Licence Holders: Rights, WA54
 Petroleum Production (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010, WA446–7
 Postage and Printing Costs, WA449
 PROGRESS Micro-finance Scheme, WA443
 Questions for Written Answer: Stationery Costs, WA63
 Redundancies: Departmental Support, WA462
 Renewable Energy Targets: Assistance, WA54–5, WA57
 Renewable Heat Incentive: Bioliq, WA62
 Rugby World Cup 2023, WA461
 SeaGen Tidal Energy System, WA462, WA463
 Sectarian Harassment Cases, WA272
 Shale Gas, WA273
 County Fermanagh, WA275, WA283
 Forum, WA274
 Single Electricity Market, WA436–7
 Smart Meters, WA53
 Social Tariffs, WA64
 Strategic Energy Framework, WA280
 Tamboran Resources Ltd: Insurance Bonds, WA440
 Titanic Signature Project: Promotion, WA56
 Tourism
 Fermanagh, WA67
 Grants in North Down, WA465
 Londonderry Quay, WA66
 Visa Waivers, WA284
 Tourism Ireland
 Funding, WA272
 Northern Ireland Contribution, WA63–4
 Tourism Strategy, WA67
 Signature Projects, WA282
 Update, WA283
 Town Centres: Support for Local Businesses, WA432

Tradelinks Programme: Bureaucracy, WA463
 Trade Union: Secondment, WA464
 Trevor Bailie: Prosecution Costs, WA282
 VAT-registered Businesses: North Antrim, WA443–4
 Visa Requirements, WA67
 Visas
 Tourists from Asia, WA442
 Waiver Scheme, WA442
 Warm Homes Discount Scheme, WA269
 Wi-Fi Access
 Hotels, WA441
 Restaurants and Cafes, WA441
 Wind Turbines: Decommissioning Costs, WA450

Frew, Mr Paul

Ministerial Statements

North/South Ministerial Council: Agriculture, 177

Oral Answers

Agriculture and Rural Development
 Broadband: Rural Areas, 63
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Hydraulic Fracturing: North Coast, 107

Private Members' Business

Decade of Centenaries, 114–15, 115
 Indigenous Fish Stocks, 48

Written answers

Agriculture and Rural Development

Anaerobic Digesters/Wind Turbines: Funding, WA392, WA453, WA475

Fishing Vessel: Decommissioning Timescale, WA391

Líofa: Funding, WA237

Livestock Theft

Identification Tags, WA229

Phantom Identification Tags, WA229

Rural Areas: Livestock Theft, WA12

Slaughterhouses: Welfare Practices, WA238

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

North/South Electricity Interconnector, WA281

Redundancies: Departmental Support, WA462

Environment

Rose Energy: Glenavy Incinerator, WA474

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Ballymena Health and Care Centre: Services, WA148

Dermatology

Appointment: Waiting Times, WA144, WA525

Funding in NHSCT, WA332

Regional Development

Ground-penetrating Radar Surveys, WA579

NI Water: Complaints, WA582

Roads Network: Structural Maintenance, WA363–4

Roads Service: Utility Companies, WA579

Gardiner, Mr Sam

Ministerial Statements

North/South Ministerial Council: Health and Food Safety, 221

Oral Answers

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration:

Culture, 58

Written Answers

Environment

Drivers: Licences Issued to those Aged Over 70, WA301

Road Freight Operator Licences, WA301

Finance and Personnel
 Rating Valuations: Town Centres, WA315
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Northern Health and Social Care Trust: Recruitment,
 WA137

Girvan, Mr Paul

Adjournment
 Parkgate Quarry, County Antrim, 263, 264, 266
 Executive Committee Business
 Budget Bill [NIA 4/11-15]
 Final Stage, 91
 Written Answers
 Finance and Personnel
 Economic Inactivity: 18-25 Age Bracket, WA331
 Justice
 Supergrass Trial: Cost, WA576

Givan, Mr Paul

Executive Committee Business
 Department of Justice, 126
 Ministerial Statement
 Article 31 Planning Applications and Decisions, 147
 Oral Answers
 Justice
 PSNI: Managed Services Contract, 238
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Police Ombudsman, 196
 Private Members' Business
 Carjacking, 152, 157
 Written Answers
 Education
 Preschool Admissions: Lagan Valley, WA34
 Primary School Admissions: Lagan Valley, WA34
 Environment
 Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan: Publication, WA119
 Planning: Article 31 Decisions, WA115
 Sprucefield Centre Ltd: Planning Application, WA497
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Audiology Services, WA533
 Justice
 Prison Service: Private Investigators, WA556
 Private Investigators
 DOJ Usage, WA169
 Prison Service Usage, WA169, WA170
 Regional Development
 NI Water: Governance and Accountability, WA600
 Social Development
 Dromore Revitalisation Scheme, WA367
 Laganbank Quarter Development Scheme, WA367
 Smithfield Square Development Proposals, WA367

Hale, Mrs Brenda

Oral Answers
 Education
 Irish-medium Schools, 24
 Environment
 Conservation: Hillsborough, 134
 Regional Development
 Conservation: Traffic Restrictions, 240
 Written Answers
 Regional Development
 Road Signs: Hillsborough, WA599
 Traffic Weight Restriction Order, WA589, WA590

Hamilton, Mr Simon

Executive Committee Business
 Marine Bill [NIA 5/11-15]
 Second Stage, 184, 184-5, 185-6, 186, 209, 210
 Private Members' Business
 Fairtrade Fortnight, 252-3, 253
 Written Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Museums: Accessibility, WA26
 Education
 Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit: DE
 Recommendations, WA42
 Employment and Learning
 Hospitality Sector: Skills, WA264
 Social Development
 Housing Executive Properties
 Comber, WA200
 Newtownards/Comber, WA200

Hilditch, Mr David

Oral Answers
 Finance and Personnel
 Government Assets, 137
 Written Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Safety of Sports Grounds: Funding, WA407
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Ulster Hospital, Dundonald: External Consultancy Fees,
 WA527

Humphrey, Mr William

Executive Committee Business
 Budget Bill [NIA 4/11-15]
 Final Stage, 91, 94
 Department of Justice, 124
 Ministerial Statement
 North/South Ministerial Council: Languages, 87
 Oral Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Ulster Canal, 22
 Windsor Park, 23
 Finance and Personnel
 Public Sector Jobs, 139
 Health, Social Services
 Women's and Children's Hospitals, Belfast, 198
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 OFMDFM: Constitutional Convention, 195
 Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration:
 Culture, 58
 Private Members' Business
 Decade of Centenaries, 98, 100, 112-13, 114
 Welfare Reform, 37
 Written Answers
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Digital Hub: Belfast, WA439
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Mater Hospital, Belfast: Expansion, WA534

Hussey, Mr Ross

Oral Answers
 Allotments, 135
 Private Members' Business
 Carjacking, 150-1, 151

Written Answers

- Agriculture and Rural Development
 - Agricultural Shows: Ministerial Attendance, WA239
- Education
 - Schools: Influence on Children, WA45
- Environment
 - Wind Turbines: Financial Benefits, WA497
- Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 - Dental Services: Tyrone County Hospital, Omagh, WA532
- Justice
 - Criminal Record Regime: Review, WA178
 - Police: Part-time Reserve Gratuity Scheme, WA158
 - Prison Service: Exit Scheme, WA573

Irwin, Mr William

- Ministerial Statements
 - North/South Ministerial Council:
 - Agriculture, 178
 - Languages, 87
- Oral Answers
 - Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 - Carer Support, 200
- Private Members' Business
 - Decade of Centenaries, 111–12
 - Indigenous Fish Stocks, 46, 46–7

Written Answers

- Agriculture and Rural Development
 - Rural Development Programme: Crossmaglen Memorial and Heritage Committee, WA240
- Education
 - Preschool Provision: Richhill, County Armagh, WA424
- Regional Development
 - A28 Killylea Road, Armagh: Street Lighting, WA351
 - A28: Overtaking Lane, WA585

Kelly, Mrs Dolores

- Assembly Business
 - Public Petition: Drumcree College, 1
- Ministerial Statement
 - North/South Ministerial Council: Agriculture, 178
- Oral Answers
 - Agriculture and Rural Development
 - Farm Modernisation Programme, 63–4
 - Employment and Learning
 - DEL: Programme for Government and Economic Strategy, 103
 - Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 - Belfast City Hospital, 198
 - Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 - Ministerial Subcommittee on Children and Young People, 60
- Private Members' Business
 - Educational Assistance for Young People, 232, 245–6, 246, 248
- Written Answers
 - Agriculture and Rural Development
 - Rural Payment Agency: Tendering Process, WA229
 - Education
 - Schools: Newbuilds in Portadown/Lurgan, WA35
 - St Patrick's Primary School, Aghagallon: Formal Intervention Process, WA253
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Emigration: 2010/2011/2012, WA275

- Finance and Personnel
 - Government Assets, WA314
- Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 - Benefit Entitlement Checks, WA522
- Social Development
 - Craigavon Integrated Development Framework, WA381
 - Development Briefs
 - Regeneration Projects, WA381
 - Town Centres, WA382
 - Warm Homes Scheme: Turkington Construction, WA209

Kelly, Mr Gerry

- Oral Answers
 - Employment and Learning
 - DEL: Dissolution, 102
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs): South Antrim, 109
 - Finance and Personnel
 - Government: Consultants, 138
 - Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 - Women's and Children's Hospitals, Belfast, 197
- Private Members' Business
 - Carjacking, 157, 159

Kennedy, Mr Danny

- Oral Answers
 - Regional Development
 - A26 and Dungiven Bypass, 242
 - Conservation: Traffic Restrictions, 240, 240–1, 241
 - Cycling, 243
 - Runkerry Development: Infrastructure, 243–4
 - Street Lighting Cables, 241
 - Traffic Wardens, 242, 243
- Revised Written Answers
 - Regional Development
 - Number of Civil Service Posts in Department, RWA5
- Written Answers
 - Regional Development
 - A26
 - Dualling Scheme, WA357
 - Travel Time, WA589
 - A28 Killylea Road, Armagh: Street Lighting, WA351
 - A28: Overtaking Lane, WA585
 - A5
 - Business Case, WA358–9
 - Capital Allocation, WA357
 - Contractors, WA359
 - Funding Breakdown, WA359
 - Inquiry, WA577
 - Length of Dual Carriageway, WA362
 - Upgrade, WA359
 - A6: Derry to Dungiven Project, WA361
 - Alleys and Pathways: Unadopted, WA600
 - Belfast to Derry Railway Line: Passenger Numbers, WA191
 - Belfast to Londonderry Railway Line, WA360
 - Blue Badges: Enforcement, WA353
 - Bus Routes: Derry to Dublin, WA582
 - Bus Stops: Digital Information Display Units, WA358
 - Civil Service: Posts, WA179–181
 - Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises:
 - DRD Spend, WA354–5
 - Courthouse Closures: Impact on Transport Costs, WA356

- Cycle Lanes: North Down, WA578
- Cycle Targets
2020, WA363
Active Travel Strategy, WA363
- Cyclists
North Down, WA578
Safety, WA600
- Duneany Road: Topography, WA354
- Equality Impact Assessments and Public Consultations:
DRD Spend, WA577
- Ferry Service: Ballycastle to Rathlin Island, WA590
- Fixed Penalty Notices: Bus Lanes, WA189–190
- Flags and Emblems: Protocol, WA601
- Fuel
DRD Spend, WA191
Hedging, WA190
- Gritting Schedule, WA351–3
North Antrim, WA354
- Ground-penetrating Radar Surveys, WA579
- Hillhall Road, Lisburn, WA580
- Hospitality: Spend, WA191–2
- Human Resources, WA190
- Larne to Belfast Railway Line: Speed Restrictions, WA192
- Level Crossings
Safety at Skeganeagh, WA189
Unmanned Gates, WA182–9
- Londonderry Railway Station
Building Work, WA581
Security, WA581
- Manholes: Theft, WA581
- Metro Services: South Belfast, WA582
- Newry Southern Relief Road, WA578
- NI Water
Complaints, WA582–3
Governance and Accountability, WA600
- North-west Rail Link: Staffing, WA587
- NSL Services Group: Funding, WA584
- Number of Civil Service Posts in Department, RWA5–6
- Parking
Priors Lea, Holywood, WA356
Private Car Park Fines, WA357
Private Car Park Regulation, WA357
- Plugged-in Places Scheme, WA587–9
- Public Transport
Investment, WA601
North Antrim, WA362
Promotion, WA361–2
Usage, WA360–1
- Postage and Printing Costs, WA579
- Questions for Written Answer: Stationery Costs, WA354
- Rail Network
Expansion to Fermanagh and Tyrone, WA362
North-west Staff Reductions, WA362–3
Weekend Staff at Ballymena Railway Station, WA363
- Rathgael Road, Bangor: Weight Restriction, WA190
- Recruitment Agencies: DRD Spend, WA181
- Road and Footpath Schemes: Groomsport, WA181
- Roads Network: Structural Maintenance, WA364
- Roads Service: Utility Companies, WA579
- Road Signs: Hillsborough, WA599
- Roads
Holywood, WA583
Spend in Donaghadee, WA356
- Salt: Roads Service Stock, WA182
- Sewer Flooding: Ballycolman Estate, Strabane, WA192
- SmartPass, WA584
- Street Lighting Schemes: Bangor, WA181
- Street Lights: Theft, WA581
- TEN-T Network: Core Node, WA580
- Trade Union
Funding, WA583–4
Secondment, WA585
- Traffic Calming Schemes: North Down, WA190
- Traffic Weight Restriction Order, WA589, WA590–9
- Train Halt: George Best Belfast City Airport/Ikea, WA182
- Trains
Driving Brake Standard Open Carriage, WA356
Gatwick Set, WA355
- Translink
DDA Compliance, WA586–7
Managerial Appointments, WA587
Redundancies, WA586
- Unadopted Roads
County Fermanagh, WA360
Financial Relief, WA586
Water Leakage, WA599–600
- Kinahan, Mr Danny**
- Adjournment
Parkgate Quarry, County Antrim, 259–60
- Executive Committee Business
High Hedges (Fee Transfer) Regulations (Northern Ireland)
2012, 213
Marine Bill [NIA 5/11-15]
Second Stage, 187–8, 188–9, 189
- Ministerial Statements
Article 31 Planning Applications and Decisions, 144
- Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Queen Elizabeth II: Diamond Jubilee, 20
- Education
Irish-medium Schools, 24
- Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs): South
Antrim, 109
- Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Carer Support, 200
- Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Strategic Investment Board, 57
- Private Members' Business
Emergency Life Support Skills, 13–14
Indigenous Fish Stocks, 53, 53–4, 54
Undeveloped Sites, 162, 162–3
- Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Badgers: Vaccination, WA12
Trials and Studies, WA230
- Horse Mussel Reefs
Infraction Fines, WA228
Management, WA228
- Staff: Disciplinary Action, WA399
- Strangford Lough
Horse Mussel Reefs, WA10
Sailing, WA10
- Environment
Coastline: ASSI Designation, WA98

Local Government: 15-council Model, WA91
 Taxis
 Belfast By-laws, WA482
 Central Station, Belfast, WA90
 Fares, WA481
 Intent of Single-tier System, WA482
 Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles, WA90
 Wind Farms: Planning Applications, WA481
 Finance and Personnel
 Building Regulations, WA508
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Ageing Population, WA148
 Disciplinary Action: DHSSPS Staff, WA530
 Elderly Care, WA338
 Location, WA149
 Health Promotion, WA335
 Health Service: Complaints Procedure, WA151
 Patient Care: Location, WA148, WA149
 Transforming Your Care: Compton Review, WA147, WA148

Lewis, Ms Pam

Adjournment
 Parkgate Quarry, County Antrim, 263
 Oral Answers
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs): South
 Antrim, 108, 108–9
 Written Answers
 Employment and Learning
 Queen's University Belfast and Stranmillis University
 College: Proposed Merger, WA267
 Environment
 Flooding: Antrim and Randalstown Areas, WA116

Lo, Ms Anna

Executive Committee Business
 High Hedges (Fee Transfer) Regulations (Northern Ireland)
 2012, 212
 Marine Bill [NIA 5/11-15]
 Second Stage, 183–4
 Ministerial Statements
 Article 31 Planning Applications and Decisions, 143
 Oral Answers
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Hydraulic Fracturing: North Coast, 107
 Private Members' Business
 Carjacking, 151–2, 152
 Undeveloped Sites, 164–5
 Written Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Slaughterhouses: CCTV, WA8
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 North/South Electricity Interconnector, WA451
 Renewable Heat Incentive: Bioliquid, WA62
 Town Centres: Support for Local Businesses, WA432
 Environment
 Archaeological Sites and Monuments: Conservation,
 WA286
 Hydraulic Fracturing: Planning Applications, WA473
 Local Government Reform: Update, WA474
 Finance and Personnel
 Cost of Division, WA331, WA508
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Cancer
 Patient Information, WA336

 Patient Support, WA337
 MRI Scanner
 Clark Clinic, Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children,
 WA342
 Paediatric Intensive Care Unit, Royal Victoria
 Hospital, WA338
 Physiotherapy Graduates: Employment, WA333
 Pseudomonas: Water Tanks, WA146
 Psychiatric Unit: Windsor House, Belfast City Hospital,
 WA515
 Regional Development
 Alleys and Pathways: Unadopted, WA600
 Metro Services: South Belfast, WA582
 Social Development
 Crumlin Road Courthouse: Redevelopment, WA383
 Derelict Properties: Village Area, South Belfast, WA607
 Girdwood
 Regeneration of North Belfast, WA382
 Tourism and Social Enterprises, WA383
 Girdwood Site: Shared Sports Facility, WA197
 Housing Benefit: Shared Accommodation, WA606

Lunn, Mr Trevor

Matters of the Day
 Rory McIlroy, 176
 Oscars: 'The Shore', 82
 Oral Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Decade of Centenaries, 118, 118–19, 119
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Go For It Programme, 109
 Finance and Personnel
 DFP: Cost of Division, 140
 Written Answers
 Assembly Commission
 MLAs: Pension Contributions, WA621
 Education
 Braidside Integrated School, Ballymena: Newbuild, WA427
 Integrated Schools: Area Planning, WA43
 Employment and Learning
 Steps to Work: Employment, WA52
 Welfare Reform Programme, WA428
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Civil Service: Tender Guidelines, WA433
 Economic Activity Rate, WA439
 Invest NI: Go For It Programme, WA273
 Finance and Personnel
 Public Works: Tender Process, WA316
 Welfare Reform, WA132
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Integrated Care Partnerships, WA138
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Economic Advice, WA2
 European Economic and Social Committee, WA389
 Regional Development
 A5: Capital Allocation, WA356
 Social Development
 Work Capability Assessments, WA208

Lynch, Mr Seán

Adjournment
 Home Help Services: County Fermanagh, 77
 Ministerial Statements
 North/South Ministerial Council: Languages, 87

Oral Answers
 Education
 North Eastern Education and Library Board: Youth Services, 27
 Regional Development
 Traffic Wardens, 243
 Written Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Common Agricultural Policy: EU Presidency, WA19
 Education
 Special Educational Needs: Legislative Protection, WA46
 Finance and Personnel
 Social Clauses: Government Contracts, WA331

Lyttle, Mr Chris

Executive Committee Business
 Department of Justice, 125, 130
 Labour Relations Agency Code of Practice on Time Off for Trade Union Duties and Activities, 229
 Oral Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Queen Elizabeth II: Diamond Jubilee, 20
 Regional Development
 A26 and Dungiven Bypass, 242
 Private Members' Business
 Decade of Centenaries, 98, 98–9
 Educational Assistance for Young People, 231–2, 232, 233
 Written Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Commemoration Project Steering Group, WA246
 Education
 Educational Underachievement Working Group, WA35
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland: Funding, WA340
 Operating Department Practitioners Number, WA333
 Vacancies, WA333
 Regional Development
 Public Transport: Investment, WA601
 Social Development
 Holywood Town Centre Masterplan, WA206
 Public Realm Scheme, WA206
 Social Housing: Loughview Estate, Holywood, WA205, WA206

McCallister, Mr John

Executive Committee Business
 Department of Justice, 127
 Ministerial Statements
 North/South Ministerial Council: Health and Food Safety, 220
 Oral Answers
 Justice
 Prisons: Full-body Searches, 237
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister Victims and Survivors Service, 193
 Private Members' Business
 Emergency Life Support Skills, 15–16, 16
 Organ Donation, 71
 Written Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Trade Union: Secondment, WA395
 Assembly Commission
 Trade Union: Funding, WA620

Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Trade Union: Secondment, WA404–5
 Education
 Trade Union: Secondment, WA421
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Tourism Strategy: Update, WA283
 Trade Union: Secondment, WA464
 Environment
 Trade Union
 Duties, WA116
 Funding, WA95
 Secondment, WA496
 Finance and Personnel
 Trade Union Duties, WA128
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Domiciliary Care: Unmet Need, WA134
 Integrated Care Partnerships, WA512
 Nursing Homes: Alleged Abuse, WA531
 Trade Union: Secondment, WA512
 Justice
 Trade Union
 Funding, WA551
 Secondment, WA555
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Trade Union: Secondment, WA390
 Regional Development
 Trade Union
 Funding, WA583
 Secondment, WA585
 Social Development
 Trade Union: Secondment, WA610

McCann, Mr Fra

Executive Committee Business
 Pensions Bill [NIA 3/11-15]
 Committee Stage, CS1, CS3
 Social Security (Loss of Benefit) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011, 3, 6
 Ministerial Statements
 Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland and Employer Engagement Plan, 226
 Private Members' Business
 Educational Assistance for Young People, 232, 233, 233–4, 234, 246, 250
 Welfare Reform, 31–2, 36
 Written Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Museums: Inventory of Artefacts, WA27
 Social Development
 Housing Executive
 Applications for Assistance with Repairs and Extension Grants, WA368
 Powers to deal with Antisocial Behaviour, WA378
 Properties: Vacant in West Belfast, WA209
 Spend on Vandalism in West Belfast, WA368
 North West Quarter Masterplan, WA369
 Tenants: Antisocial Behaviour, WA368

McCann, Ms Jennifer

Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Rural Poverty, 65
 Finance and Personnel
 Titanic Quarter: Public Sector Projects, 140

Private Members' Business

Carjacking, 158–9, 159
Fairtrade Fortnight, 255

Written Answers

Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Invest NI: Job Promotion, WA277
Finance and Personnel
Suicide: Deaths from 2001 to 2011, WA317
Unemployment: 2001 to 2011, WA321
Social Development
Poverty: Constituency Breakdown, WA371

McCarthy, Mr Kieran

Ministerial Statements

North/South Ministerial Council: Agriculture, 178
North/South Ministerial Council: Health and Food Safety, 221
North/South Ministerial Council: Languages, 87
North/South Ministerial Council: Waterways, 84

Oral Answers

Agriculture and Rural Development
Rural Poverty, 65
Culture, Arts and Leisure
DCAL: Cohesion, Sharing and Integration, 22
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Community Pharmacists, 199
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration:
Culture, 58

Private Members' Business

Emergency Life Support Skills, 9, 11
Fairtrade Fortnight, 254, 258
Indigenous Fish Stocks, 46
Organ Donation, 68, 68–9

Written Answers

Culture, Arts and Leisure
Sport Matters, WA403
Sport: Participation, WA406
Education
School Principals, WA42
Schools: Expenditure on Front Line Services, WA251
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Invest NI: Stakeholder Perceptions, WA464
Titanic Signature Project: Promotion, WA56
Environment
Environmental Schemes, Projects and Initiatives: ROI
Co-operation, WA286
Renewable Energy: Planning Applications, WA68
Finance and Personnel
Suicide: North Down, WA327
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Births: Teenage Mothers, WA519
Cancer: Prevention, Treatment and Care, WA147
Depression: North Down, WA151
Life Expectancy, WA523
Obesity, WA517
Oral Cancer: Human Papilloma Virus Vaccination, WA140
Parental Alcohol/Drug Dependency: Children at Risk,
WA518
Smoking
Manual Workers, WA524
Reduction, WA524
Suicide: Reduction, WA519
Regional Development
Cyclists: Safety, WA600

McCartney, Mr Raymond

Executive Committee Business

Department of Justice, 124, 125

Ministerial Statements

North/South Ministerial Council: Waterways, 84
Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland and Employer
Engagement Plan, 226

Oral Answers

Culture, Arts and Leisure
Windsor Park, 24
Employment and Learning
Universities Ireland, 103, 104
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Unemployment, 106
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Suicide Prevention Implementation Group, 197
Justice
Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005, 238
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
EU Commissioner for Research, Innovation and
Science, 195

Private Members' Business

Educational Assistance for Young People, 235

Written Answers

Environment
Civil Servants from the Foyle Constituency who Work in
Greater Belfast, WA96
Planning Application A/2010/0493/F, WA483
Finance and Personnel
Empty Properties: Foyle, WA132
Justice
Compensation: Major Incident Claims, WA163

McCausland, Mr Nelson

Executive Committee Business

Social Security (Loss of Benefit) (Amendment) Regulations
(Northern Ireland) 2011, 2–3, 3, 6–7, 7

Private Members' Business

Welfare Reform, 33–4, 34, 34–5, 35, 37

Revised Written Answers

Social Development
Disability Living Allowance, RWA7

Written Answers

Social Development
Advice Services, Funding, WA386
ATOS Healthcare Induction Programme, WA197
Benefits
Over £26,000, WA207–8
Uptake, WA617–8
Boiler Replacement Scheme, WA210, WA619
Extension, WA386
Business Improvement Districts, WA619
Capital Projects, Foyle, WA618
Civil Service Posts, WA197–8
Compensation Claims: Winter Weather, WA365
Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises:
DSD Spend, WA364
Co-ownership Scheme, WA369, WA370–1
Funding, WA209
Crisis Loans, WA195–7
Crumlin Road Courthouse: Redevelopment, WA383
Decent Homes Standard, WA606
Derelict Land or Property: Deprived Wards, WA192–4

Derelict Properties: Village Area, South Belfast, WA607
 Development Briefs
 Regeneration Projects, WA381
 Town Centres, WA382
 Disability Assessments:
 Royston House, Belfast, WA204
 Travel Assistance, WA205
 Disability Living Allowance:
 Alcohol/Drug Addiction, WA604
 Alcoholics, WA384
 Inequality, WA612
 Welfare Reform Changes, WA207
 Dromore Revitalisation Scheme, WA367
 Economically Inactive Long-term Sick People, WA608–9
 Economy 7 Heating, WA602
 Employment and Support Allowance: Appeal Rate, WA605
 Empty Properties: North Down, WA610
 Equality Impact Assessments/Consultations: DSD
 Spend, WA377–8
 FirstBuyNI Scheme, WA209
 Fuel: DSD Spend, WA208
 Fuel Allowance Payments, WA210
 North Down, WA607
 Girdwood
 Regeneration of North Belfast, WA382
 Tourism and Social Enterprises, WA383
 Girdwood Site: Shared Sports Facility, WA197
 Green New Deal: Cost Benefit Analysis, WA377
 Hollywood Town Centre
 Masterplan, WA206
 Public Realm Scheme, WA206
 Homelessness
 Council Area, WA605–6
 Single Young Men, WA379–80, WA380
 Hospitality: Spend, WA207
 Housing
 Harbour Ward, Bangor, WA369
 Waiting Lists in Strabane and Omagh, WA385
 Housing Benefit
 Shared Accommodation, WA606–7
 Housing Executive
 Annadale Flats Maintenance Repairs, WA366
 Annadale Flats Roof Repairs, WA366, WA383–4
 Applications for Assistance with Repairs and
 Extension Grants, WA368
 Capital Spend, WA364
 Craigavon Integrated Development Framework, WA381
 Homelessness Strategy 2012–17, WA385
 Ministerial Meetings, WA384, WA604
 Payments to Staff, WA610
 Powers to deal with Antisocial Behaviour, WA378
 Recruitment, WA366–7
 Spend on Vandalism in West Belfast, WA368
 Succession of Tenancy, WA611–12
 Temporary Accommodation, WA608
 Temporary Accommodation in Derry, WA619–20
 Tenants: Antisocial Behaviour, WA368
 Vacant Properties in North Down, WA385
 Vandalism in North Down, WA606
 Housing Executive Properties
 Comber, WA200
 Four Bedrooms, WA614–5
 Millisle, WA208

Mould and Damp, WA199
 Newbuilds in Derry, WA618
 Newtownards/Comber, WA200
 North Down, WA613, WA617
 Vacancies, WA615–6
 Vacant in West Belfast, WA209
 Housing Executive Tenants: Evictions, WA205
 Human Resources, WA198
 Income Support
 Belfast/Derry/Armagh, WA199–200
 North Down, WA613
 Laganbank Quarter Development Scheme, WA367
 Lagside Events Grant Scheme, WA205
 Neighbourhood Renewal Areas: Funding, WA373–5
 Ministerial Meetings: DWP, WA604
 Mortgages, WA619
 North West Quarter Masterplan, WA369
 Postage and Printing Costs, WA602
 Poverty
 Constituency Breakdown, WA371–2
 Rural Dwellers, WA201
 Questions for Written Answer: Stationery Costs, WA202
 Recruitment Agencies: DSD Spend, WA195
 ReStore Programme, Carrickfergus: Funding, WA383
 Smithfield Square Development Proposals, WA367
 Social Housing
 Completed Units, WA376
 Five-/Six-bedroom Units, WA202–4
 Loughview Estate, Holywood, WA205, WA206
 Unmet Need, WA376–7
 Social Security (Loss of Benefit) (Amendment)
 Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011, WA385
 Street Trading Licences: Transfer, WA380–1
 Tenants: Antisocial Behaviour, WA368–9
 Town Centre Masterplans, WA378–9
 Trade Union: Secondment, WA610–11
 Training Programmes: Enrolments, WA201
 Volunteer Centres: Protective Notice, WA198
 Warm Homes Scheme: Turkington Construction, WA209–10
 Welfare Reform: Discussions with DWP, WA384
 Work Capability Assessments, WA202, WA208

McClarty, Mr David

Oral Answers

Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Queen Elizabeth II: Diamond Jubilee, 20
 Regional Development
 Runkerry Development: Infrastructure, 243, 244
 Traffic Wardens, 243

Private Members' Business

Organ Donation, 67

Written Answers

Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Invoices: Late Payment, WA147
 Regional Development
 Blue Badges: Enforcement, WA353

McCrea, Mr Basil

Executive Committee Business

Department of Justice, 127, 128
 Labour Relations Agency Code of Practice on Time Off for
 Trade Union Duties and Activities, 229

Ministerial Statements
 Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland and Employer Engagement Plan, 227–8

Oral Answers
 Employment and Learning
 Youth Unemployment, 101
 Environment
 Conservation: Hillsborough, 134
 Finance and Personnel
 Businesses: Tax Liabilities, 138
 Justice
 Prison Service: Enhanced Severance, 236

Private Members' Business
 Carjacking, 154, 154–5
 Educational Assistance for Young People, 232, 232–3, 234

Written Answers
 Employment and Learning
 Step Ahead, WA53
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Business Start-up Programme
 Advice and Support, WA461
 Interested Parties, WA461
 KPMG Payment, WA56
 Tender Process, WA55, WA452
 Enterprise Development Programme
 Delivery Costs, WA460
 KPMG Payment, WA56
 KPMG Role, WA55
 Invest NI: Use of Consultants, WA459
 Go For It Programme, WA268
 Finance and Personnel
 Youth Contract, WA329
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Prisoners: Regulation of Prescription Medicine, WA532
 Justice
 Prison Service: Senior Management, WA575

McCrea, Mr Ian

Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Farm Modernisation Programme, 64
 Education
 Maghera High School Site, 26
 Employment and Learning
 Higher Education: Regional Colleges, 105

Private Members' Business
 Indigenous Fish Stocks, 48, 51

Written Answers
 Employment and Learning
 South West Regional College: Beacon Awards, WA267

McDevitt, Mr Conall

Executive Committee Business
 Department of Justice, 124, 124–5, 130, 130–1, 131

Oral Answers
 Education
 Preschool Admissions: Criteria, 25
 Employment and Learning
 Higher Education: Regional Colleges, 105
 Justice
 Multiagency Risk Assessment Conferences Operational Group, 239

Private Members' Business
 Decade of Centenaries, 110–11, 111

Fairtrade Fortnight, 251–2
 Organ Donation, 74–5, 75

Written Answers
 Education
 Education and Skills Authority: Resignation of Chairperson, WA37
 Schools: Asbestos, WA422
 Environment
 Vehicle Tax: Roadside Checks, WA469
 Social Development
 Lagside Events Grant Scheme, WA205
 Training Programmes: Enrolments, WA201

McDonnell, Dr Alasdair

Oral Answers
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Invest NI: Business Loans Scheme, 106
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Women's and Children's Hospitals, Belfast, 198
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Foreign Direct Investment, 194

Private Members' Business
 Decade of Centenaries, 114
 Welfare Reform, 33, 34

Written Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Human Resources, WA7
 Recruitment Agencies: DARD Spend, WA226
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Fishing: Licence Checks, WA247
 Inland Fisheries: Staff, WA246, WA401
 Employment and Learning
 Human Resources, WA51
 Recruitment Agencies: DEL Spend, WA48
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Credit Easing: Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, WA285
 Environment
 Discharge Consents, WA483
 Finance and Personnel
 Human Resources, WA130
 Recruitment Agencies: DFP Spend, WA311
 Justice
 Prison Service: Exit Schemes, WA576
 Recruitment Agencies: DOJ Spend, WA153
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Human Resources, WA5
 Recruitment Agencies: OFMDFM Spend, WA3
 Regional Development
 Human Resources, WA190
 Recruitment Agencies: DRD Spend, WA181
 Social Development
 Human Resources, WA198
 Recruitment Agencies: DSD Spend, WA195

McElduff, Mr Barry

Ministerial Statements
 Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland and Employer Engagement Plan, 225

Oral Answers
 Education
 Minister for Education and Skills, 25
 Employment and Learning
 Youth Unemployment, 101

Finance and Personnel
 Public Sector Jobs, 139
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Omagh Enhanced Local Hospital, 200
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Strategic Investment Board, 57
 Regional Development
 Conservation: Traffic Restrictions, 241
 Private Members' Business
 Carjacking, 152–3
 Educational Assistance for Young People, 244–5, 245

Written Answers

Agriculture and Rural Development
 River Designation: Cloughfin/Altamuskin, WA239
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Mental Health Services: Omagh, WA340
 Speech and Language Therapists: Recruitment, WA334
 Northern Ireland Assembly Commission
 Parliament Buildings
 Content of Tour, WA386
 Video-conferencing Facilities, WA387

McGimpsey, Mr Michael

Oral Answers

Agriculture and Rural Development
 Flood Prevention, 62
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Belfast City Hospital, 198

Written Answers

Employment and Learning
 Apprenticeships, WA264
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Tourism Strategy, WA67
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Cancer; Prevention, Treatment and Care, WA144
 Social Development
 Housing Executive
 Annadale Flats Maintenance Repairs, WA366
 Annadale Flats Roof Repairs, WA366, WA383

McGlone, Mr Patsy

Adjournment

Parkgate Quarry, County Antrim, 265

Executive Committee Business

Budget Bill [NIA 4/11-15]
 Final Stage, 95
 Marine Bill [NIA 5/11-15]
 Second Stage, 201–2, 202

Ministerial Statements

Article 31 Planning Applications and Decisions, 145
 North/South Ministerial Council: Languages, 88

Oral Answers

Employment and Learning
 Universities Ireland, 104
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Suicide Prevention Implementation Group, 197

Private Members' Business

Indigenous Fish Stocks, 51
 Undeveloped Sites, 166–7, 167
 Welfare Reform, 32, 38

Revised Written Answers

Social Development
 Disability Living Allowance, RWA7

Written Answers

Agriculture and Rural Development
 Fuel: DARD Spend, WA227
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Fuel: DCAL Spend, WA242
 Education
 Fuel: DE Spend, WA250
 Schools: Viability Audit, WA45
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Fuel: DETI Spend, WA67
 Invest NI
 Land, WA62
 Land for Economic Development, WA58
 Environment
 Brown Bins, WA96
 Hydraulic Fracturing: Environmental Impact, WA466
 MOT Test: Changes, WA68
 Planning Policy Statement 21: Review, WA497
 Finance and Personnel
 Employees: Re-hired following Retirement, WA313
 Family Fund
 Applications, WA346
 Funding Allocation, WA346
 Fuel: DFP Spend, WA316
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Fuel: DHSSPS Spend, WA137
 Health Service: Vacancies, WA334
 Justice
 Fuel: DOJ Spend, WA169
 Regional Development
 Fuel: DRD Spend, WA191
 Fuel Hedging, WA190
 Social Development
 Fuel: DSD Spend, WA208

McGuinness, Mr Martin

Executive Committee Business

Department of Justice, 121–2, 131

Oral Answers

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 A5 Dual Carriageway, 61–2
 FM/DFM: Foreign Direct Investment, 58–9, 59, 59–60
 Ministerial Subcommittee on Children and Young
 People, 60
 Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration:
 Culture, 58
 Race Relations, 61
 Strategic Investment Board, 57, 57–8

Written Answers

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 After Schools Clubs: North Antrim, WA213–14
 Arm's-length Bodies, WA6
 Expenditure, WA5
 Artwork: OFMDFM Inventory, WA214–18
 Asylum Seekers and Refugees: Security Clearance, WA223
 Ballykelly Army Base: Costs, WA223
 Budget Review Group: Update, WA224–5
 Capital Realisations: Money Generated, WA223
 Children and Young People's Strategy, WA6
 Civil Service: Posts, WA4
 Commissioner for Public Appointments: Remit, WA222
 Community Relations Programme: Funding, WA218–19

Ebrington Barracks
 Opening Costs, WA220–1
 Provision of Services, WA221–2
 Ebrington Parade Ground, WA4–5
 Economic Advice, WA2
 Ethnic Minority Development Fund, WA390
 European Economic and Social Committee, WA389
 Flexible Working/Affordable Childcare: Danish Model, WA224
 Funding Allocations: Ministerial Approval, WA225
 Historical Institutional Abuse Taskforce: Update, WA224
 Hospitality: Spend, WA220
 Human Resources, WA5
 Ilex
 Contracts Awarded, WA221
 Regeneration Projects, WA2–3
 Irish Language: Promotion, WA219–20
 Maze/Long Kesh: Development Board, WA3–4
 Mobile Phone Applications, WA2
 Play and Leisure Policy, WA213
 Play and Leisure Strategic Partnerships, WA1–2
 Race Relations (NI) Order 1997, WA223–4
 Racism Strategy, WA5
 Recruitment Agencies: OFMDFM Spend, WA3
 Religious Discrimination
 Employment, WA1
 Marriage, WA1
 Shackleton Barracks, Ballykelly: Update, WA225–6
 Social Investment Fund
 Implementation Process, WA225
 Update, WA225
 Social Protection Fund, WA3
 Fuel Poverty, WA213
 Strategic Support Fund: FAIR Application, WA6
 Strategic Support Funding 2012-13, WA5
 Trade Missions: Objectives, WA222
 Trade Union: Secondment, WA390
 Victims and Survivors Service, WA389
 Workplace Discrimination, WA390

McIlveen, Mr David

Ministerial Statements
 Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland and Employer Engagement Plan, 227
 Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Animal Welfare: Slaughterhouses, 64
 Finance and Personnel
 Government: Consultants, 138
 Private Members' Business
 Carjacking, 149–50
 Indigenous Fish Stocks, 51
 Written Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Agricultural, Hunting and Fishing Industries:
 Employment, WA237
 Questions for Written Answer: Stationery Costs, WA9
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Doping: Sport, WA23
 Líofo: Funding, WA243
 Questions for Written Answer: Stationery Costs, WA27
 Ulster-Scots Academy: Ministerial Advisory Group, WA244
 Education
 Job Losses: Education Sector, WA413

Questions for Written Answer: Stationery Costs, WA253
 STEM Qualifications, WA426
 Employment and Learning
 Care Leavers
 Career Opportunities, WA50
 Specialist Employment Schemes, WA49
 Questions for Written Answer: Stationery Costs, WA52
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Credit Easing: Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, WA284
 Employment: People without Qualifications, WA448
 Fuel: Regional Pricing, WA275
 Job Creation: North Antrim, WA452
 Northern Workforce Development Forum: Ballymena, WA444
 Questions for Written Answer: Stationery Costs, WA63
 VAT-registered Businesses: North Antrim, WA443
 Environment
 Planning Policy Statements: Section 75 Screening, WA484
 Restaurants and Bars: Disability Access, WA485
 Finance and Personnel
 Questions for Written Answer: Stationery Costs, WA134
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Alcohol: Average Adult Consumption, WA339
 Antrim Area Hospital, WA345
 Coeliac Disease
 Diagnosis, WA145
 Support, WA145
 Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland: Judicial Review, WA340
 Family Planning Association: Funding, WA511
 Myalgic Encephalomyelitis Specialists, WA143
 Pharmaceutical Contractors Committee: Judicial Review, WA517
 Smoking: Private Vehicles, WA522
 Tobacco Control Strategy, WA520
 Justice
 Judicial Review: Legal Costs, WA548
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Asylum Seekers and Refugees: Security Clearance, WA223
 Flexible Working/Affordable Childcare: Danish Model, WA224
 Race Relations (NI) Order 1997, WA223
 Workplace Discrimination, WA390
 Regional Development
 Public Transport:
 North Antrim, WA362
 Promotion, WA361
 Usage, WA360
 Questions for Written Answer: Stationery Costs, WA354
 Social Development
 Disability Living Allowance: Inequality, WA612
 Economically Inactive Long-term Sick People, WA608, WA609
 Homelessness: Single Young Men, WA379, WA380
 Housing Executive
 Homelessness Strategy 2012-17, WA385
 Succession of Tenancy, WA611
 Mortgages, WA619
 Questions for Written Answer: Stationery Costs, WA201

McIlveen, Miss Michelle

Matters of the Day
 Oscars: 'The Shore', 82

Ministerial Statements

- North/South Ministerial Council
 - Languages, 86
 - Waterways, 83

Oral Answers

- Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Creative Industries, 108
- Finance and Personnel
 - Businesses: Tax Liabilities, 138

Private Members' Business

- Indigenous Fish Stocks, 44–5, 48
- Undeveloped Sites, 160–2

Written Answers

- Agriculture and Rural Development
 - Fishing Vessels
 - Injuries, WA11
 - Safety, WA11
- Environment
 - Built Heritage
 - Investment, WA475
 - Revenue Generated, WA474
 - Historic Buildings: Targeted Surveys, WA301
 - 'Protocol for the Care of the Historic Government Estate', WA310
- Justice
 - Convictions: Unspent, WA171
 - Driving Offences
 - Drink, WA159
 - Drink or Drugs, WA159
 - Prison Service: Artefacts, WA545

McKay, Mr Daithí

Oral Answers

- Culture, Arts and Leisure
 - Ulster Canal, 22
- Education
 - Maghera High School Site, 27
- Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 - FM/DFM: Foreign Direct Investment, 58, 59

Written Answers

- Agriculture and Rural Development
 - 'Agri-food: A Study for Cross-border Co-operation', WA9, WA226
 - Agrifood Sector: Development, WA227
 - Postage and Printing Costs, WA237
- Culture, Arts and Leisure
 - Arts Council
 - Funding for the Braid Centre, Ballymena, WA23
 - Meeting with Ballymena Borough Council, WA23
 - Flags and Emblems
 - Arts Council Funding, WA24
 - Funding Conditions, WA24
 - Legal Advice, WA24
 - Football Association of Ireland: Ministerial Meeting, WA22
 - Postage and Printing Costs, WA245
- Education
 - CRED Policy, WA427
 - Homophobic Bullying, WA423
 - Pupils: Sexual Orientation, WA424
 - Schools: Ministerial Invitations, WA416
 - Special Needs Schools: Enrolments, WA425
- Employment and Learning
 - Postage and Printing Costs, WA263

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

- Broadband Services, WA459
- Energy Prices: Impact on Low Income families, WA65
- Geothermal Energy: Legislative Framework, WA443
- Home Heating Oil Suppliers: Customer Charter, WA463
- Hotels: Capital Grants, WA65
- Hydraulic Fracturing: County Fermanagh, WA451
- Natural Gas
 - Availability, WA453, WA455
 - Extension of Network to Ballycastle, WA459
 - Prices, WA455
 - Uptake, WA454, WA455
- Nuclear Power: Local Facility, WA459
- 'Our time, Our Place': Sporting Organisations, WA465
- Postage and Printing Costs, WA237, WA449, WA469
- Sectarian Harassment Cases, WA272
- Social Tariffs, WA64
- Tourism: Visa Waivers, WA284
- Visa Requirements, WA67
- Visas
 - Tourists from Asia, WA442
 - Waiver Scheme, WA442
- Wi-Fi Access
 - Hotels, WA440
 - Restaurants and Cafes, WA441

Environment

- Carrier Bags: Single Use Levy, WA123, WA124, WA125
- Hotels: Planning Applications, WA105
- MOT: Exemptions, WA482
- Northern Area Plan: Moyle, WA92, WA93
- Planning Application E/2009/0303/0

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

- Ambulances: Average Travel Time, WA509, WA510
- Care Homes: Complaints of Neglect/Abuse, WA511
- Fire Station, Ballycastle: Capital Funding, WA513
- Postage and Printing Costs, WA337

Justice

- HMP Maghaberry: Full Body Searching, WA569
- Postage and Printing Costs, WA537

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

- Art and Antique Works: Value, WA210
- Paper Wastage, WA620
- Parliament Buildings: Content of Tour, WA386

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

- Irish Language Promotion, WA219
- Mobile Phone Applications, WA2, WA119
- Religious Discrimination: Marriage, WA1

Regional Development

- A26: Travel Time, WA589
- Gritting Schedule, WA351
 - North Antrim, WA354
- Duneany Road: Topography, WA353
- Postage and Printing Costs, WA579

Social Development

- Postage and Printing Costs, WA602

McKevitt, Mrs Karen

Matters of the Day

- Oscars: 'The Shore', 82

Ministerial Statements

- North/South Ministerial Council
 - Languages, 88
 - Waterways, 84

Oral Answers
 Education
 Irish-medium Schools, 24
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Creative Industries, 108
 Finance and Personnel
 Asset Management Unit: Land and Property Services, 141
 Titanic Quarter: Public Sector Projects, 140
 Private Members' Business
 Decade of Centenaries, 115
 Indigenous Fish Stocks, 45–6
 Written Answers
 Education
 Nursery Schools: Development Proposal for St Patrick's
 Primary School, WA252
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Autism: Speech-generated Devices, WA151
 Craigavon Area Hospital: Fertility Clinic, WA339

McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel

Adjournment
 Parkgate Quarry, County Antrim, 261–2
 Executive Committee Business
 Budget Bill [NIA 4/11-15]
 Final Stage, 92, 96
 Oral Answers
 Environment
 Allotments, 136
 Conservation: Hillsborough, 134
 Private Members' Business
 Decade of Centenaries, 100
 Written Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Agrifood: Economic Recovery, WA19
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Líofa 2015, WA26
 Finance and Personnel
 Asset Management Unit: Update, WA330

McMullan, Mr Oliver

Executive Committee Business
 Marine Bill [NIA 5/11-15]
 Second Stage, 186, 188
 Ministerial Statements
 North/South Ministerial Council
 Agriculture, 178
 Languages, 87
 Waterways, 84
 Oral Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 DCAL: Cohesion, Sharing and Integration, 23
 Employment and Learning
 Higher Education: Regional Colleges, 104
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Hydraulic Fracturing: North Coast, 107
 Justice
 Prison Service: Enhanced Severance, 236
 Private Members' Business
 Indigenous Fish Stocks, 47, 48, 49, 53, 54
 Written Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Glenariff Forest Park, WA398
 Production Diseases, WA17

Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Creative Industries Apprenticeships: BBC/UTV, WA247
 European Heritage Status, WA412
 Fishing: Riparian Owners/Leaseholders, WA406
 Finance and Personnel
 Small Business Rate Relief Scheme, WA130

McNarry, Mr David

Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Market Gardening, 66
 Finance and Personnel
 Government: Consultants, 139
 Private Members' Business
 Emergency Life Support Skills, 14
 Written Answers
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Electricity: Renewable Sources, WA462
 SeaGen Tidal Energy System, WA462, WA463

McQuillan, Mr Adrian

Oral Answers
 Education
 Special Educational Needs, 27, 28
 Finance and Personnel
 DFP: Cost of Division, 140
 Regional Development
 Street Lighting Cables, 241
 Written Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Salmon Species: Catch and Release, WA24, WA25
 Employment and Learning
 Investors in People: East Londonderry, WA265
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Arthritis, WA533
 Justice
 Community Safety Strategies: Priorities, WA572
 Rural Communities: Safety, WA571, WA572
 Rural White Paper, WA571
 Social Development
 Social Investment Fund: Implementation Process, WA225

Maginness, Mr Alban

Executive Committee Business
 Department of Justice, 122–3, 123, 124, 125, 127, 132
 Public Bodies (Abolition of the National Endowment for
 Science, Technology and the Arts) Order 2012, 216–17
 Oral Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Ulster Canal, 22
 Justice
 Prison Service: Enhanced Severance, 236
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 OFMDFM: Constitutional Convention, 196
 Regional Development
 Cycling, 243
 Traffic Wardens, 242
 Private Members' Business
 Carjacking, 154, 155
 Written Answers
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Prostate Cancer
 Abiraterone, WA344

Spend on Treatment, WA344
 Treatment Options, WA511
 Shared Services: Expenditure, WA137

Maskey, Mr Alex

Executive Committee Business
 Social Security (Loss of Benefit) (Amendment) Regulations
 (Northern Ireland) 2011, 4
 Oral Answers
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Foreign Direct Investment, 194
 Private Members' Business
 Welfare Reform, 29–30, 35–6, 36, 37, 38
 Written Answers
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Historical Institutional Abuse Taskforce: Update, WA224
 Social Development
 Housing Executive Properties: Mould and Damp, WA199

Maskey, Mr Paul

Oral Answers
 Finance and Personnel
 Businesses: Tax Liabilities, 138
 Private Members' Business
 Carjacking, 148–9, 151, 155
 Written Answers
 Employment and Learning
 Teacher Education Infrastructure, WA431
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland: Judicial Review,
 WA531

Molloy, Mr Francie

Oral Answers
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Ministerial Subcommittee on Children and Young
 People, 60
 Written Answers
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Winter Fuel Allowance: Cancer Patients, WA532

Molloy, Mr Francie (as Principal Deputy Speaker)

Adjournment
 Home Help Services: County Fermanagh, 76
 Parkgate Quarry, County Antrim, 263, 264, 266
 Executive Committee Business
 Marine Bill [NIA 5/11-15]
 Second Stage, 204
 Rates (Amendment) Bill [NIA 2/11-15]: Royal Assent, 141
 Oral Answers
 Environment, 133, 135, 136
 Finance and Personnel, 139, 140, 141
 Private Members' Business
 Organ Donation, 67, 68, 70, 71, 72, 75
 Undeveloped Sites, 160, 164, 167, 169, 170
 Welfare Reform, 17, 19

Morrow, The Lord

Executive Committee Business
 High Hedges (Fee Transfer) Regulations (Northern Ireland)
 2012, 214
 Oral Answers
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Omagh Enhanced Local Hospital, 201

Regional Development
 Traffic Wardens, 242
 Private Members' Business
 Indigenous Fish Stocks, 46, 47, 50, 51
 Written Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Dog Attacks
 Convictions, WA396
 Livestock, WA230
 Dogs (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, WA228
 Fishing: Non-attendance at Meeting, WA11
 Líofo 2015
 Spend, WA399
 Uptake, WA400
 Ulster-Scots Culture and Heritage, WA397, WA401
 Education
 Beginning Teachers: GTC Registration, WA252
 Teachers: Recruitment when Newly Qualified, WA31
 Employment and Learning
 Architecture Graduates: Employment, WA260
 Bachelor of Education: UCAS Points, WA256
 Certificate of Religious Education, WA50–1, WA263
 Engineering Graduates: Employment, WA258
 Law Graduates: Employment, WA257
 Medical Graduates: Employment, WA261
 Nursing Graduates: Employment, WA262
 Queens University Belfast and Stranmillis University
 College: Proposed Merger, WA47, WA265, WA429
 St Mary's University College: Positive Discrimination,
 WA258
 Stranmillis University College: Staff Meeting, WA51
 Environment
 Councils
 Debt, WA91
 Debt Reduction, WA298
 Written-off Debt, WA117
 Driver and Vehicle Agency: Mobile Units, WA95
 Finance and Personnel
 UK Credit Rating, WA330
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Sex Offenders, WA530
 Children's Barred List, WA522
 South Tyrone Hospital, Dungannon: Service Provision,
 WA534
 Justice
 Barry Johnston, WA164
 Bench Warrants, WA165
 Case Number 12/20314, WA178, WA351
 Child Abduction: Convictions, WA350
 Colin Bell: Death in Custody, WA154
 Court Cases: Taxing Master, WA570
 Courthouse Closures
 Consultation, WA571
 Costs Incurred by Defendants, WA165
 Impact on Transport Costs, WA162, WA356, WA570
 Impact on Travel Costs, WA549
 Courthouses: Antisocial Behaviour, WA348
 Drugs: Couriers, WA152
 Enniskillen Courthouse: Double Yellow Lines, WA171
 HMP Maghaberry
 Pearson Recommendations, WA551
 Proposed Bowling Green, WA349
 Unannounced Visits, WA537

Kanran Jafar: Release from HMP Maghaberry, WA347
 Lawyers: Mileage Claims, WA158
 Legal Aid
 12 July 2011 Public Order Offences, WA347
 Occupy Belfast, WA570
 Life Sentences (Northern Ireland) Order 2001, WA552
 Marion Price: Accommodation at Hydebank Wood, WA537
 Non-jury Trials: Cost, WA569
 Prisoner Assessment Unit:
 Failings, WA162
 Staff, WA177
 Prisoners
 Category A, WA552, WA555
 Drug Use, WA164
 Forensic Psychologist Assessments, WA162
 Prison Governors: Suspension, WA555
 Prisons
 Ministerial Visits, WA347
 Offensive Weapons, WA165
 Searching Practices, WA536
 Prison Service: Pearson Review, WA549
 Prison Service Staff
 Disciplinary Actions or Investigations, WA535
 Driving Without Insurance, WA547
 Suspended from Duty, WA154
 Public Order Offences: 12 July 2011, WA170
 Ronnie Graham
 Psychiatric Assessment, WA555
 Release from Custody, WA549
 Sexual Offenders Treatment Programme, WA569
 Safer Custody Project, WA348
 Schmallenberg Virus, WA393
 Sexual Abuse: Members of the Clergy, WA549
 Sexual Offender Treatment Programme, WA152
 Relapses, WA547
 Summons Cases: Performance, WA170
 Summonses: Costs, WA176

Moutray, Mr Stephen

Executive Committee Business
 Public Bodies (Abolition of the National Endowment for
 Science, Technology and the Arts) Order 2012, 217
 Oral Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Queen Elizabeth II: Diamond Jubilee, 20
 Private Members' Business
 Decade of Centenaries, 99–100, 100
 Written Answers
 Finance and Personnel
 Consultants: NIAO Spend, WA330
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Arm's-length Bodies: Expenditure, WA5
 Racism Strategy, WA5
 Trade Missions: Objectives, WA222
 Social Development
 Poverty, Rural Dwellers, WA200

Murphy, Mr Conor

Executive Committee Business
 Budget Bill [NIA 4/11-15]: Final Stage, 90–1
 Official Statistics Order (Northern Ireland) 2012, 42
 Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Farm Modernisation Programme, 63
 Finance and Personnel
 Government Assets, 137

Nesbitt, Mr Mike

Executive Committee Business
 Marine Bill [NIA 5/11-15]: Second Stage, 191–2
 Matters of the Day
 Golf: Rory McIlroy, 175
 Oral Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 DCAL: Cohesion, Sharing and Integration, 23
 Education
 Special Educational Needs, 28
 Employment and Learning
 Universities Ireland, 104
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Hydraulic Fracturing: North Coast, 107
 Environment
 Association of British Insurers, 134
 Finance and Personnel
 Government: Consultants, 139
 Justice
 PSNI: Managed Services Contract, 238
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Ministerial Subcommittee on Children and Young
 People, 60
 Private Members' Business
 Emergency Life Support Skills, 10
 Written Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Creative Industries
 Promotional Campaign, WA405
 Promotion in Hollywood, WA405
 Rory McIlroy: US Open Success, WA248
 Finance and Personnel
 'Rebalancing the Northern Ireland Economy, WA503
 Justice
 Prison Service
 Board Members, WA550
 Trust Support, WA551
 Trust Volunteers, WA551
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Funding Allocations: Ministerial Approval, WA225
 Maze/Long Kesh: Development Board, WA3
 Victims and Survivors Service, WA389

Newton, Mr Robin

Written Answers
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Cancer: Young People, WA520, WA521

Ní Chuilín, Ms Carál

Ministerial Statements
 North/South Ministerial Council: Languages, 85–6, 86, 87,
 87–8, 88
 North/South Ministerial Council: Waterways, 83, 83–4, 84, 85
 Oral Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 DCAL: Cohesion, Sharing and Integration, 22, 22–3, 23
 Fishing Rights, 21
 Queen Elizabeth II: Diamond Jubilee, 20, 20–21
 Ulster Canal, 21, 22
 Ulster Scots: Ministerial Advisory Group, 23
 Windsor Park, 23, 24
 Private Members' Business
 Indigenous Fish Stock, 51–2, 52–3, 53

Written Answers

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Angling Licences

Attracting Visitors, WA404

Granted to Visitors, WA404

Arm's-length Bodies: Budget Allocation, WA26

Arts Council

Funding for the Braid Centre, Ballymena, WA23

Meeting with Ballymena Borough Council, WA23

Brandywell Stadium, Derry

Upgrade, WA402

Bushmills Salmon Station, WA20–2

Civil Service: Posts, WA246

Commemoration Project Steering Group, WA246

Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises:

DCAL Spend, WA22, WA242

Creative Industries

Promotional Campaign, WA406

Promotion in Hollywood, WA405

Creative Industries Apprenticeships: BBC/UTV, WA247–8

Cultural Infrastructure: DCAL Spend, WA244

Cultural Tourism Potential: South Down, WA403

Decade of Centenaries, WA27

Doping: Sport, WA23

Enniskillen Library: Refurbishment, WA24

Equality Impact Assessments and Consultations: DCAL Spend, WA242

European Heritage Status, WA412

Fishing

License Checks, WA247

Lough Neagh, WA27

Net Licences for Lough Neagh, WA412–3

Riparian Owners/Leaseholders

Flags and Emblems

Arts Council Funding, WA24

Funding Conditions, WA24

Legal Advice, WA24

Football Association of Ireland: Ministerial Meeting, WA22

Fuel: DCAL Spend, WA242

Hospitality: Spend, WA22, WA241–2

Inland Fisheries

Staff, WA246–7

Staffing, WA401–2

Kennedy Kane McArthur, WA28

Libraries

Lisburn Road Opening Hours, WA246

Líofa 2015, WA27

Costs, WA407

Funding, WA243–4

Museums

Accessibility, WA26

Inventory of Artefacts, WA27–8

NI Screen: Board Appointments, WA247

Oscars Success: 'The Shore', WA405, WA412

Postage and Printing Costs, WA245

Questions for Written Answer: Stationery Costs, WA27

Quoile Barrier: Fish Pass, WA412

Rory McIlroy: US Open Success, WA248

Rugby World Cup 2023, WA404

Safety of Sports Grounds: Funding, WA407–11

Salmon Species: Catch and Release, WA24, WA25, WA25–6

Salmon Stocks: River Bush, WA245

Soccer: Capital Investment in Brandywell Stadium, WA247

Sport: Participation, WA406

Sport Matters, WA403

Sports Events: Ministerial Attendance, WA401

Trade Union: Secondment, WA405

Ulster-Scots Academy: Ministerial Action Group, WA244–5

Water Bailiffs

Numbers Employed, WA243

Training and Support, WA243

Ó hOisín, Mr Cathal

Matters of the Day

Oscars: 'The Shore', 82

Ministerial Statements

North/South Ministerial Council: Languages, 86

North/South Ministerial Council: Waterways, 83

Oral Answers

Environment

Association of British Insurers, 133

Justice

PSNI: Managed Services Contract, 237

Regional Development

A26 and Dungiven Bypass, 242

Private Members' Business

Indigenous Fish Stocks, 45, 47

Written Answers

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Budget Review Group: Update, WA224

O'Dowd, Mr John

Oral Answers

Education

Irish-medium Schools, 24

Maghera High School Site, 26, 26–7, 27

Minister for Education and Skills, 25, 26

North Eastern Education and Library Board: Youth Services, 27

Preschool Admissions: Criteria, 25

Special Educational Needs, 27–8, 28

Written Answers

Education

Academic Selection, WA36

Antenatal Appointments, WA36

Area Plans: Consultation, WA248

Ballymoney High School: Capital Works, WA38

Beginning Teachers: GTC Registration, WA252

Braidside Integrated School, Ballymena: Newbuild, WA427

Bunscoil Cholmcille, Derry: Funding Applications, WA33

Civil Service: Posts, WA426

Classroom Assistants: Funding, WA414, WA416

Community Use of School Premises, WA424

Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises:

DE Spend, WA250

CRED Policy, WA428

Education and Library Board: Staff Contact with Pupils, WA427

Education and Skills Authority

Chief Executive, WA42

Legislative Process, WA252–3

Resignation of Chairperson, WA37

Educational Attainment: Children and Young People with Disabilities, WA39

- Educational Underachievement: Children with Disabilities, WA250
- Educational Underachievement Working Group, WA35
- Efficiency Savings, WA33
- Fuel: DE Spend, WA250
- Gaeltacht/Irish-medium Schools: Cross-border Collaborative Programme, WA35
- Garvagh High School, Coleraine, WA428
- Grants, WA248–9
- Home to School Transport Scheme
- Eligibility, WA254
- Private Buses, WA254
- Homophobic Bullying, WA423
- Job Losses: Education Sector, WA413–4
- Jolly Tots Playgroup, Mayobridge, WA414
- Integrated Schools: Area Planning, WA43
- Literacy and Numeracy Co-ordinators: Qualifications, WA253
- Nursery Schools
- Development Proposals, WA251–2
- Development Proposal for St Patrick's Primary School, Mayobridge, WA252
- Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit: DE Recommendations, WA42
- Postage and Printing Costs, WA413
- Post-primary Schools
- Educational Achievement, WA43
- South Down, WA40–2
- Preschool Admissions: Lagan Valley, WA34
- Preschool Provision: Richhill, County Armagh, WA424
- Primary School
- Compulsory Starting Age, WA28
- Primary School Admissions: Lagan Valley, WA34
- Pupils
- Cross-border Attendance, WA38
- Not Achieving GCSEs, WA427
- Republic of Ireland Admissions, WA38
- Sexual Orientation, WA424
- Speech, Language and Communication Difficulties, WA28–9
- Statements at Mainstream Schools, WA255
- Travel to School Time, WA43
- Questions for Written Answer: Stationery Costs, WA253
- School Principals, WA42
- School Transport
- Private Buses on Unserviced Routes, WA255
- Special Educational Needs Provision, WA255
- Schools
- Asbestos, WA420–1, WA422–3
- Classroom Assistants, WA44–5
- Closure Criteria, WA34
- Departmental Communication, WA33
- Efficiency Savings, WA34
- Energy Efficiency, WA415–6
- Expenditure on Front Line Services, WA251
- Influence on Children, WA45
- Ministerial Invitations, WA416–20
- Newbuilds in Portadown/Lurgan, WA35
- Viability Audit, WA45
- Special Educational Needs:
- Legislative Protection, WA46
- Proposals, WA44
- Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005: Article 3, WA422
- Special Needs Schools: Enrolments, WA425–6
- Speech and Language Centre: Knockavoe School and Resource Centre, Strabane, WA254
- Speech and Language Services, WA249–50
- Speech and Language Therapists: WELB, WA37
- St Patrick's Primary School, Aghagallon: Formal Intervention Process, WA253
- Staff Transfer, WA424
- Statement of Special Educational Needs
- Mainstream Schools, WA36–7
- Support, WA30–1
- STEM Qualifications, WA426–7
- Teachers
- Recruitment When Newly Qualified, WA31, WA32
- Redundancy or Early Retirement Packages, WA416
- Trade Union: Secondment, WA422
- Woodlands Language Unit, Derry, WA30
- Closure, WA30
- O'Neill, Mrs Michelle**
- Ministerial Statements
- North/South Ministerial Council: Agriculture, 177, 178, 178–9, 179
- Oral Answers
- Agriculture and Rural Development
- Animal Welfare: Slaughterhouses, 64, 65
- Broadband: Rural Areas, 62–3, 63
- Farm Modernisation Programme, 63, 64
- Flood Prevention, 62
- Market Gardening, 66
- Rural Poverty, 65
- Written Answers
- Agriculture and Rural Development
- Agricultural, Hunting and Fishing Industries:
- Employment, WA237
- Agricultural Shows: Ministerial Attendance, WA239
- 'Agri-food: A Study for Cross-border Co-Operation', WA10, WA226–7
- Agri-food Strategy Board: Appointments, WA234
- Agri-food: Economic Recovery, WA19
- Agri-food Sector: Development, WA227
- Anaerobic Digesters/Wind Turbines: Funding, WA392
- Badgers: Vaccination, WA12
- Badger Vaccination Trials and Studies, WA230
- Civil Service: Posts, WA13
- Common Agricultural Policy: EU Presidency, WA19
- Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises: DARD Spend, WA227–8
- Countryside Management Scheme: Tenancies, WA20
- DARD Headquarters: Relocation, WA399
- DARD Jobs: Enniskillen, WA396
- DARD Staff: Disciplinary Action, WA399–400
- Dog Attacks
- Convictions, WA396
- Livestock, WA230
- Dog Collars: Electric Shock Capability, WA400
- Dogs (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, WA228–9
- Equality Impact Assessments/Consultations: DARD Spend, WA13
- Equality Unit, WA7
- EU Funding: Amount Surrendered, WA231–2
- Farm Modernisation Scheme, WA13

Fertilisers: Cost to Farmers, WA8
 Fisheries: Selective Gear, WA20
 Fishing
 Non-attendance at Meetings, WA11–12
 Fishing Vessels
 Decommissioning Timetable, WA391
 Injuries, WA11
 Safety, WA11
 Flooding, WA17
 Flooding: South and East Belfast, WA241
 Forestry Service: Leases, WA233–4
 Fuel: DARD Spend, WA227
 Glenariff Forest Park, WA398
 Horse Mussel Reefs
 Infraction Fines, WA228
 Management, WA228
 Human Resources, WA7
 Job Advert: Irish, WA400, WA401
 Líoifa 2015
 Funding, WA237
 Spend, WA399
 Uptake, WA400
 Livestock Theft
 Identification Tags, WA229
 Phantom Identification Tags, WA229
 Pig Producers: Export Opportunities, WA226
 Postage and Printing Costs, WA237
 Postgraduate Studentship, WA392–3, WA393
 Production Diseases, WA17–18
 Questions for Written Answer: Stationery Costs, WA9
 Ranunculus Fluitans, WA8
 Recruitment Agencies: DARD Spend, WA226
 Republican Movement: Crossmaglen, WA394, WA395
 River Designation: Cloughfin/Altamuskin, WA239
 Rural Areas: Livestock Theft, WA12
 Rural Community Development Services, WA232
 Rural Crime, WA17, WA18, WA398
 Rural Development Programme, WA391–2
 Crossmaglen Memorial and Heritage Committee, WA240
 Republican Movement, Crossmaglen, WA240–1
 Rural Payment Agency: Tendering Process, WA229
 Schmallenberg Virus, WA235, WA236–7, WA393–4, WA397
 Sheep/Cattle Imports, WA390–1
 Single Farm Payments, WA7
 Delays, WA397
 Timescales, WA396
 Slaughterhouses
 CCTV, WA8–9
 Welfare Practices, WA238
 Sperrin House, Omagh: Lease, WA232–3
 Stewardship Areas: DARD Funding, WA240
 Strangford Lough
 Horse Mussel Reefs, WA10
 Pot Fishing, WA18–19
 Sailing, WA10
 Trade Union: Secondment, WA395
 Trees: North Down, WA9
 Tuberculosis: Cattle, WA241
 Ulster-Scots Culture and Heritage, WA397–8, WA401
 Veterinary Work: Private Arrangements, WA236
 Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments)
 Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012, WA7

Overend, Mrs Sandra

Executive Committee Business
 Public Bodies (Abolition of the National Endowment for
 Science, Technology and the Arts) Order 2012, 217
 Ministerial Statements
 Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland and Employer
 Engagement Plan, 225
 Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Farm Modernisation Programme, 64
 Education
 Maghera High School Site, 26
 Employment and Learning
 DEL: Programme for Government and Economic
 Strategy, 103
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Unemployment, 106
 Environment
 Local Government Reform, 137
 Finance and Personnel
 DFP: Cost of Division, 140
 Private Members' Business
 Decade of Centenaries, 113
 Educational Assistance for Young People, 246–7, 247
 Indigenous Fish Stocks, 48, 49
 Undeveloped Sites, 166
 Written Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Agri-Food Strategy Board: Appointments, WA235
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 North/South Electricity Interconnector, WA280
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Play and Leisure Strategic Partnerships, WA1–2

Poots, Mr Edwin

Adjournment
 Children and Young People with Cancer: East Belfast, 173–4
 Home Help Services: County Fermanagh, 77–9
 Ministerial Statements
 North/South Ministerial Council: Health and Food Safety,
 219–20, 220, 221, 222
 Oral Answers
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Belfast City Hospital, 198, 198–9
 Carer Support, 200
 Community Pharmacists, 199, 200
 Omagh Enhanced Local Hospital, 200, 200–1
 Suicide Prevention Implementation Group, 197
 Women's and Children's Hospitals, Belfast, 197,
 197–8, 198
 Private Members' Business
 Emergency Life Support Skills, 14, 14–15
 Organ Donation, 72–4
 Revised Written Answers
 Cyberknife Stereotactic Body Radiotherapy, RWA4
 Payment of Invoices: 10-day Target, RWA4
 Written Answers
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Accident and Emergency: Average Waiting Times, WA342
 Ageing Population, WA148–9
 Alcohol: Average Adult Consumption, WA339–40
 Ambulances: Average Travel Time, WA510
 Antrim Area Hospital, WA345

- Arthritis, WA533
- Audiology Services, WA533
- Autism: Speech-generated Devices, WA151
- Ballymena Health and Care Centre: Services, WA148
- Benefit Entitlement Checks, WA522–3
- Bipolar Disorder
- Diagnosis, WA343
 - Number Being Treated, WA343
 - Treatment and Support, WA344
- Births: Teenage Mothers, WA519–20
- Blood: Received in Northern Ireland, WA341
- Bronchial Challenge Test, WA138
- Business Services Organisation
- Correspondence Requests, WA345
 - Staffing Issues, WA345
- Business Services Transformation Programme, WA535
- Cancer
- Care and Treatment of Children and Young People, WA343
 - Patient Data, WA145–6
 - Patient Information, WA336–7
 - Patient Support, WA337
 - Prevention, Treatment and Care, WA144, WA147
 - Support in Rural Areas, WA332–3
 - Young People, WA520–21, WA521, WA521–2
- Cardiac Ablation Procedures, WA136
- Care Homes: Complaints of Neglect/Abuse, WA511
- Causeway Hospital, Coleraine: Viability, WA526–7
- Children's Services: Cross-departmental Initiatives, WA511
- Civil Service: Posts, WA136
- Coliac Disease
- Diagnosis, WA145
 - Support, WA145
- Community Meals, WA341
- Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland
- Funding, WA340
 - Judicial Review, WA340, WA531
- Complementary and Alternate Medicines Pilot Project, WA336
- Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises: DHSSPS Spend, WA143
- Craigavon Area Hospital: Fertility Clinic, WA339
- Dental Remuneration: Practice Allowance, WA342
- Dental Services
- County Fermanagh, WA516
 - Practice Allowance, WA534–5
 - Savings Proposals, WA140
 - Tyrone County Hospital, Omagh, WA532
- Depression: North Down, WA151
- Dermatology
- Funding in NHSCT, WA332
- Dermatology Appointment: Waiting Times, WA144, WA525–6
- Diabetes Provision: Audit, WA527
- Disciplinary Action: DHSSPS Staff, WA530
- Domiciliary Care: Unmet Need, WA134–5
- Elderly Care, WA338
- Location, WA149
- Family Fund
- Applications, WA346
 - Funding Allocation, WA346
- Family Planning Association: Funding, WA511
- Fire Station, Ballycastle: Capital Funding, WA513–14
- Fire Station: Newcastle, WA515
- Fuel: DHSSPS Spend, WA137
- GP Surgeries: 0844 Numbers, WA514
- Health Promotion, WA335
- Health Service
- Complaints Procedure, WA151
 - Vacancies, WA334–5
- Home Start: Funding, WA136–7
- Hospitality: Spend, WA139–40
- Hospitals
- Enniskillen, WA515–6
 - Newbuild in Enniskillen, WA141–2
 - Retail Outlets, WA339
- Integrated Care Partnerships, WA138, WA512
- Invoices: Late Payment, WA147
- Job Losses: South Down, WA346
- Kinship Care, WA140
- Life Expectancy, WA523–4
- Liver Function Tests, WA529
- Malnutrition: Older People, WA509
- Marion Price: Move to Hydebank Wood, WA339
- Mater Hospital, Belfast: Expansion, WA534
- Mental Health Services: Omagh, WA340
- MRI Scanner
- Clark Clinic, Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children, WA342–3
 - Paediatric Intensive care Unit, Royal Victoria Hospital, WA338
- Multiple System Atrophy, WA150
- Muscular Dystrophy Duchene, WA142–3
- Myalgic Encephalomyelitis Association: Funding, WA531
- Myalgic Encephalomyelitis Specialists, WA143
- Neurologists: Waiting Times, WA335–6
- NICE Technology Appraisals/Clinical Guidelines, WA528, WA530–1
- Northern Health and Social Care Trust: Recruitment, WA137–8
- Northern Ireland Cancer Network: Workplan, WA343
- Northern Ireland Electronic Care Record Outline
- Business Case: Software Companies, WA139, WA528–9, WA529–30
- Nursing Care: Cost, WA146
- Nursing Cover, Belmont House Special School, Derry, WA346
- Nursing Homes: Alleged Abuse, WA531–2
- Obesity, WA517–18
- Operating Department Practitioners
- Number, WA333
 - Vacancies, WA333–4
- Oral Cancer: Human Papilloma Virus Vaccination, WA140–1
- Parental Alcohol/Drug Dependency: Children at Risk, WA518
- Patient Care: Location, WA148, WA149
- Pharmaceutical Contractors Committee: Judicial Review, WA517
- Physiotherapy Graduates: Employment, WA333
- Postage and Printing Costs, WA337
- Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, WA533
- Prisoners: Regulation of Prescription Medicine, WA532
- Prostate Cancer
- Abiraterone, WA344
 - Spend on Treatment, WA344–5
 - Treatment Options, WA511–12

Pseudomonas
 Microbiological Standards, WA508–9, WA509,
 WA512, WA513
 Water Tanks, WA146
 Psychiatric Unit: Windsor House, Belfast City Hospital,
 WA515
 Rare Diseases, WA529
 Definition, WA150
 Update, WA151
 Sex Offenders, WA530
 Children's Barred List, WA522
 Shared Services
 Expenditure, WA137
 Implementation Timescale, WA148
 Smoking
 Manual Workers, WA524–5
 Private Vehicles, WA522
 Reduction, WA524
 Social Care: Residential Homes, WA514, WA514–5
 South Tyrone Hospital, Dungannon: Service Provision,
 WA534
 Speech and Language Therapists: Recruitment, WA334
 Stereotactic Ablative Radiotherapy, WA141, WA533–4
 Suicide: Reduction, WA519
 Tobacco Control Strategy, WA520
 Trade Union: Secondment, WA512
 Transforming Your Care: Compton Review, WA147, WA148
 Tyrone County Hospital: Booking Line, WA149–50
 Ulster Hospital, Dundonald: External Consultancy Fees,
 WA527
 Winter Fuel Allowance: Cancer Patients, WA532

Ramsey, Mr Pat

Ministerial Statements
 Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland and Employer
 Engagement Plan, 225
 Oral Answers
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Carer Support, 200
 Justice
 Prisons: Full-body Searches, 237
 Private Members' Business
 Educational Assistance for Young People, 234
 Organ Donation, 72
 Written Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Countryside Management Scheme: Tenancies, WA19
 Education
 Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order
 2005: Article 3, WA422
 Speech and Language Centre: Knockavoe School and
 Resource Centre, Strabane, WA254
 Speech and Language Services, WA249
 Speech and Language Therapists: WELB, WA37
 Statement of Special Educational Needs: Mainstream
 Schools, WA36
 Employment and Learning
 North West Regional College: Redundancies, WA431
 Students: Maintenance Loans for Irish Passport
 Holders, WA259
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Diabetes Provision: Audit, WA527
 Kinship Care, WA140

Nursing Cover: Belmont House Special School, Derry,
 WA346
 Tyrone County Hospital: Booking Line, WA149
 Justice
 Contraband: Roe House, HMP Maghaberry, WA177
 Marian Price
 Accommodation at Hydebank Wood, WA536
 Move to Hydebank Wood, WA177, WA339
 Security at Hydebank Wood, WA349
 Northern Ireland Assembly Commission
 Art and Antique Works: Value, WA 211
 Paper Wastage, WA620
 Parliament Buildings: Heating and Electricity, WA211–2
 Printer Ink Cartridges: Procurement, WA621
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Ebrington Barracks
 Opening Costs, WA220
 Provision of Services, WA221
 Ebrington Parade Ground, WA4
 Illex: Contracts Awarded, WA221
 Social Development
 Compensation Claims: Winter Weather, WA365
 Housing Executive
 Payments to Staff, WA609
 Temporary Accommodation, WA608
 Temporary Accommodation in Derry, WA619

Ramsey, Ms Sue

Executive Committee Business
 High Hedges (Fee Transfer) Regulations (Northern Ireland)
 2012, 214
 Ministerial Statements
 North/South Ministerial Council: Health and Food Safety, 220
 Oral Answers
 Environment
 Local Government Reform, 136
 Finance and Personnel
 Government: Consultants, 139
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Community Pharmacists, 199
 Private Members' Business
 Educational Assistance for Young People, 250
 Emergency Life Support Skills, 9, 9–10
 Organ Donation, 56, 66, 67, 68, 71
 Written Answers
 Education
 Post-primary Schools: Educational Achievement, WA335
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Employment Opportunities, WA284
 Environment
 Rose Energy: Planning Application, WA497
 Regional Development
 Bus Stops: Digital Information Display Units, WA357
 Social Development
 Neighbourhood Renewal Areas: Funding, WA373

Ritchie, Ms Margaret

Executive Committee Business
 Budget Bill [NIA 4/11-15]: Final Stage, 90
 Ministerial Statements
 North/South Ministerial Council: Waterways, 84–8
 Private Members' Business
 Welfare Reform, 18, 37, 37–8, 38

Written Answers

- Agriculture and Rural Development
 - Delays, WA397
 - Timescale, WA396
- Education
 - Jolly Tots Playgroup, Mayobridge, WA414
 - Nursery Schools: Development Proposals, WA251
 - Schools: Classroom Assistants, WA44
 - Single Farm Payments
- Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Construction Industry, WA269
 - Tradelinks Programme: Bureaucracy, WA463
 - Warm Homes Discount Scheme, WA269
- Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 - Business Services Transformation Programme, WA535
- Regional Development
 - Unadopted Roads: Financial Relief, WA585
- Social Development
 - Housing Executive, Ministerial Meetings, WA384, WA604
 - Ministerial Meetings: DWP, WA604
 - Welfare Reform: Discussions with DWP, WA384

Robinson, Mr George

- Oral Answers
 - Justice
 - Rural Crime, 240
 - Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 - Foreign Direct Investment, 59
 - Regional Development
 - A26 and Dungiven Bypass, 241–2, 242
- Private Members' Business
 - Educational Assistance for Young People, 245
 - Emergency Life Support Skills, 14, 16
 - Indigenous Fish Stocks, 50–1
 - Undeveloped Sites, 165
- Written Answers
 - Environment
 - Planning Application B/2100/0057/F, WA118
 - Justice
 - Computer Hacking, WA164
 - Courthouse Closures
 - Financial Impact, WA552
 - Impact on Legal Aid, WA552
 - Impact on Travel Costs, WA552
 - Policing and Community Safety Partnerships:
 - Independent Members, WA347
 - Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 - Shackleton Barracks, Ballykelly: Update, WA225
 - Regional Development
 - Londonderry Railway Station
 - Building Work, WA581
 - Security, WA581

Robinson, Mr Peter

- Executive Committee Business
 - Department of Justice, 128, 131, 132
- Oral Answers
 - Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 - Barroso Task Force, 195
 - EU Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science, 195
 - Foreign Direct Investment, 193–4, 194
 - OFMDFM: Constitutional Convention, 196

- Police Ombudsman, 196
- Victims and Survivors Service, 193

Written Answers

- Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 - After Schools Clubs: North Antrim, WA213–14
 - Arm's-length Bodies, WA6
 - Expenditure, WA5
 - Artwork: OFMDFM Inventory, WA214–18
 - Asylum Seekers and Refugees: Security Clearance, WA223
 - Ballykelly Army Base: Costs, WA223
 - Budget Review Group: Update, WA224–5
 - Capital Realisations: Money Generated, WA223
 - Children and Young People's Strategy, WA5–6
 - Civil Service: Posts, WA4
 - Commissioner for Public Appointments: Remit, WA222
 - Community Relations Programme: Funding, WA218–19
 - Ebrington Barracks
 - Opening Costs, WA220–1
 - Provision of Services, WA221–2
 - Ebrington Parade Ground, WA4–5
 - Economic Advice, WA2
 - Ethnic Minority Development Fund, WA390
 - European Economic and Social Committee, WA389
 - Flexible Working/Affordable Childcare: Danish Model, WA224
 - Funding Allocations: Ministerial Approval, WA225
 - Historical Institutional Abuse Taskforce: Update, WA224
 - Hospitality: Spend, WA220
 - Human Resources, WA5
- Ilex
 - Contracts Awarded, WA221
 - Regeneration Projects, WA2–3
- Irish Language: Promotion, WA219–20
- Maze/Long Kesh: Development Board, WA3–4
- Mobile Phone Applications, WA2
- Play and Leisure Policy, WA213
- Play and Leisure Strategic Partnerships, WA1–2
- Race Relations (NI) Order 1997, WA223–4
- Racism Strategy, WA5
- Recruitment Agencies: OFMDFM Spend, WA3
- Religious Discrimination
 - Employment, WA1
 - Marriage, WA1
- Shackleton Barracks, Ballykelly: Update, WA225–6
- Social Investment Fund
 - Implementation Process, WA225
 - Update, WA225
- Social Protection Fund, WA3
 - Fuel Poverty, WA213
- Strategic Support Fund: FAIR Application, WA6
- Strategic Support Funding 2012-13, WA5
- Trade Missions: Objectives, WA222
- Trade Union: Secondment, WA390
- Victims and Survivors Service, WA389
- Workplace Discrimination, WA390

Ross, Mr Alastair

- Ministerial Statements
 - Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland and Employer Engagement Plan, 226
- Oral Answers
 - Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 - Foreign Direct Investment, 193, 194

Race Relations, 61
 Private Members' Business
 Organ Donation, 56, 70, 70-1, 71
 Written Answers
 Education
 Pupils: Speech, Language and Communication
 Difficulties, WA28
 Justice
 Prisons: Speech and Language Therapists, WA158

Ruane, Ms Caitriona

Oral Answers
 Education
 Irish-medium Schools, 24
 Employment and Learning
 Programme for Government and Economic Strategy, 103
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Race Relations, 61
 Victims and Survivors Service, 193
 Written Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Fisheries: Selective Gears, WA20
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Decade of Centenaries, WA27
 Oscars Success: 'The Shore', WA412
 Education
 Post-primary Schools: South Down, WA40
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Credit Unions, WA285

Sheehan, Mr Pat

Executive Committee Business
 Department of Justice, 126-7, 127
 Matters of the Day
 Golf: Rory McIlroy, 176
 Oral Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Fishing Rights, 21
 Private Members' Business
 Decade of Centenaries, 112
 Written Answers
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Cardiac Ablation Procedures, WA136

The Speaker (Mr William Hay)

Assembly Business, 121
 Public Petition: Drumcree College, 1
 Resignation of Margaret Ritchie, 81
 Statutory Committee Membership, 1
 Executive Committee Business
 Budget Bill [NIA 4/11-15]
 Consideration Stage, 2
 Further Consideration Stage, 41
 Department of Justice, 121, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128,
 129, 130, 131, 132, 133
 Marine Bill [NIA 5/11-15]
 Second Stage, 192
 Matters of the Day
 Golf: Rory McIlroy, 175
 Oscars: 'The Shore', 81
 Ministerial Statements
 North/South Ministerial Council: Health and Food Safety, 221

Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland and Employer
 Engagement Plan, 226, 227
 Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development, 62
 Employment and Learning, 101, 104
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment, 108, 109
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety, 196, 198, 199, 201
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, 58,
 61, 195, 196
 Private Members' Business
 Educational Assistance for Young People, 230, 232, 233,
 234, 235
 Emergency Life Support Skills, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
 Indigenous Fish Stocks, 43, 46, 47, 48

Spratt, Mr Jimmy

Written Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Arm's-length Bodies: Budget Allocation, WA26
 Libraries: Lisburn Road Opening Hours, WA246
 Environment
 Archaeological Objects: Licence Requirements, WA485
 Detection Devices: Protected Sites, WA486
 European Charter of Local Self-Government, WA298
 Planning: Application Backlog, WA496
 Treasure, WA485
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Bipolar Disorder
 Diagnosis, WA343
 Number being Treatment, WA343
 Treatment and Support, WA344
 Justice
 Colin Bell: Death in Custody, WA161, WA163
 Prison Officers
 Suicide Watch Training, WA161
 Training for Night Custody Duties, WA160
 Prisoners: Death by Suicide, WA161, WA162, WA163
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Community Relations Programme: Funding, WA218
 Social Development
 Co-ownership Scheme: Funding, WA209, WA369, WA370
 FirstBuy NI Scheme, WA209

Storey, Mr Mervyn

Executive Committee Business
 Marine Bill [NIA 5/11-15]
 Second Stage, 183
 Ministerial Statements
 Article 31 Planning Applications and Decisions, 143
 Oral Answers
 Education
 Minister for Education and Skills, 26
 Justice
 Multiagency Risk Assessment Conferences Operational
 Group, 238, 239
 Private Members' Business
 Undeveloped Sites, 165
 Written Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Rural Crime, WA18, WA398
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Kennedy Kane McArthur, WA28

Education
 Ballymoney High School: Capital Works, WA37
 Civil Service: Posts, WA426
 Educational Attainment: Children and Young People with Disabilities, WA39
 Educational Underachievement: Children with Disabilities, WA250
 Pupils
 Cross-border Attendance, WA38
 Republic of Ireland Admissions, WA38
 Schools: Energy Efficiency, WA415
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre, WA284
 Environment
 Listed Buildings: Ballymoney/Ballycastle/Ballymena, WA121
 Planning Policy Statement 18, WA69
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 After Schools Clubs: North Antrim, WA213
 Regional Development
 Belfast to Londonderry Railway Line, WA360

Swann, Mr Robin

Adjournment
 Parkgate Quarry, County Antrim, 261
 Matters of the Day
 Oscars: 'The Shore', 81
 Ministerial Statements
 North/South Ministerial Council: Agriculture, 179
 North/South Ministerial Council: Languages, 86
 North/South Ministerial Council: Waterways, 83
 Oral Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Fishing Rights, 21
 Justice
 Rural Crime, 239, 239–40
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Foreign Direct Investment, 59
 Private Members' Business
 Decade of Centenaries, 110
 Fairtrade Fortnight, 253, 253–4
 Indigenous Fish Stocks, 43–4, 46, 47, 52, 53
 Written Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Farm Modernisation Scheme, WA13
 Ranunculus Fluitans, WA8
 Rural Community Development Services, WA232
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Bushmills Salmon Station, WA20
 Fishing: Net Licences for Lough Neagh, WA412
 Líofo 2015: Costs, WA407
 Salmon Stocks: River Bush, WA245
 Water Bailiffs
 Number Employed, WA243
 Training and Support, WA243
 Education
 Area Plans: Consultation, WA248
 Employment and Learning
 Teachers
 English at Post-primary Level, WA51
 STEM Subjects, WA50
 Tourism Strategy: Signature Projects, WA282
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Creative Industries: Invest NI Funding, WA59

Home Heating Oil: Retail Pump Sales, WA449
 'Our Time, Our Place' Initiative, WA57
 Environment
 Northern Area Plan
 Development Framework, WA481
 Timescale, WA480
 Vehicles: Registration of Imports, WA101
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Liver Function Tests, WA529
 Muscular Dystrophy Duchene, WA142
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Social Protection Fund, WA3
 Regional Development
 A26 Dualling Scheme, WA357
 Ferry Service: Ballycastle to Rathlin Island, WA589, WA590
 Social Development
 ATOS Healthcare Induction Programme, WA197
 Derelict Land or Property: Deprived Wards, WA192
 Housing Executive Properties
 Four Bedrooms, WA614
 Vacancies, WA615
 Social Housing
 Completed Units, WA376
 Five-/Six-bedroom Units, WA202
 Unmet Need, WA376
 Work Capability Assessments, WA202

Weir, Mr Peter

Executive Committee Business
 High Hedges (Fee Transfer) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012, 212–13
 Marine Bill [NIA 5/11-15]
 Second Stage, 184, 185, 189, 190–1
 Matters of the Day
 Golf: Rory McIlroy, 175–6
 Oral Answers
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Invest NI: Business Loans Scheme, 106
 Private Members' Business
 Emergency Life Support Skills, 8–9, 9, 10
 Organ Donation, 69
 Undeveloped Sites, 162, 167, 169–70
 Revised Written Answers
 Environment
 Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan, RWA4
 Written Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises:
 DARD Spend, WA227
 Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012, WA7
 Assembly Commission
 Trade Union: Funding, WA620
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises:
 DCAL Spend, WA22, WA242
 Sports Events: Ministerial Attendance, WA401
 Education
 Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises:
 DE Spend, WA250
 Efficiency Savings, WA33
 Pupils: Statements at Mainstream Schools, WA255

Schools
 Departmental Communication, WA33
 Efficiency Savings, WA34

Employment and Learning
 Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises:
 DEL Spend, WA259

Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises:
 DETI Spend, WA437
 Tourism: Grants in North Down, WA465

Environment
 Areas of Townscape Character, WA486
 Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan: Timescale, WA113
 Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises:
 DOE Spend, WA300

Councils
 Capital Spend, WA118
 Community Planning Functions, WA114
 Domestic Local Rates/Non-domestic Local Rates,
 WA307
 General Grant, WA306

Cyclists
 Cross-departmental Policy, WA472
 Safety from Lorries, WA470

Cyclists and Pedestrians: Road Safety, WA471

Driver and Vehicle Agency: Policy/Legislation Changes,
 WA100

Environmental Offences: Convictions, WA102

Genmar Companion
 Anchorage, WA93
 Debrief, WA114
 Oil Removal, WA92

Local Government: Reform, WA98

MLAs: Remuneration, WA118

National Park: Mourne, WA101

Pollution: Croft Burn, WA304

River Pollution, WA303

Finance and Personnel
 Actual Penny Product, WA325
 Civil Service: Recruitment, WA134
 Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises:
 DFP Spend, WA315
 Contracts: Thresholds, WA504

Properties
 Rates Register, WA500
 Unidentified Ownership, WA500

Rates Bills, WA129

Rating: Arrears, WA505, WA507

Small Business Rate Relief Scheme, WA325

Unemployment: Long-term Estimates, WA324

Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises:
 DHSSPS Spend, WA143
 Shared Services: Implementation Timescale, WA148

Justice
 Anti-social Behaviour Orders: North Down, WA556
 Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises:
 DOJ Spend, WA169
 Disabled Car Parking Bays: Misuse, WA554
 Drink Driving: Convictions, WA553
 Policing and Community Safety Partnerships:
 Independent Members, WA349, WA543

Small Claims Court
 Advice, WA547
 Appeals, WA547
 Sobriety Tags, WA177

Regional Development
 Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises:
 DRD Spend, WA354

Cycle Targets
 2020, WA363
 Active Travel Strategy, WA363

Roads: Holywood, WA583

Social Development
 Benefits: Uptake, WA617
 Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises:
 DSD Spend, WA364
 Disability Assessments
 Royston House, Belfast, WA204
 Travel Assistance, WA205

Empty Properties: North Down, WA610

Homelessness: Council Area, WA605

Housing Executive
 Vacant Properties in North Down, WA385
 Vandalism in North Down, WA606

Housing Executive Properties: North Down, WA613, WA617

Housing Executive Tenants: Evictions, WA205

Income Support: North Down, WA612

Town Centre Masterplans, WA378

Wells, Mr Jim

Adjournment
 Parkgate Quarry, County Antrim, 264–5, 266

Oral Answers
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Community Pharmacists, 199

Private Members' Business
 Carjacking, 155, 155–6
 Educational Assistance for Young People, 245
 Fairtrade Fortnight. 253, 258, 258–9, 259
 Organ Donation, 55, 56, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 72

Written Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Job Advert: Irish, WA400

Employment and Learning
 South Eastern Regional College: Applications, WA267

Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 GP Surgeries: 0844 Numbers, WA514
 Myalgic Encephalomyelitis Association: Funding, WA531

Regional Development
 Newry Southern Relief Road, WA578

Wilson, Mr Sammy

Executive Committee Business
 Budget Bill [NIA 4/11-15]: Final Stage, 89–90, 90, 93,
 93–4, 94, 94–5, 95–6, 96–7
 Official Statistics Order (Northern Ireland) 2012, 41–2, 42

Oral Answers
 Finance and Personnel
 Asset Management Unit: Land and Property Services, 141
 Businesses: Tax Liabilities, 138
 Cost of Division, 140
 Government Assets, 137
 Government: Consultants, 138, 138–9, 139
 Public Sector Jobs, 139, 140

Titanic Quarter: Public Sector Projects, 140

Written Answers

Finance and Personnel

Account NI: PwC Contract, WA132–3

Actual Penny Product, WA325–6

Administrative Officer Posts, WA128–9

Asset Management Unit: Update, WA330

Barnett Formula, WA331

Benefits: Failure to Claim, WA324

Block Grant, WA505

Building Regulations, WA508

Businesses: South Down, WA504

Car-charging Units: Stormont Estate, WA499

Civil Servants: Retired but Working as Consultants, WA125

Civil Service

Job Applications, WA508

Posts, WA312–13

Recruitment, WA134

Vacancies, WA125–8

Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises:

DFP Spend, WA315

Consultants: NIAO Spend, WA330

Contracts

Central Procurement Directorate, WA499

Thresholds, WA504

Cost of Division, WA331, WA508

Economic Inactivity: 18-25 Age Bracket, WA331–2

Elderly Population: North Down, WA131–2

Employees: Re-hired Following Retirement, WA313–14

Employment

District Council Areas, WA501–2

Employment: Public Sector, WA502–3

Empty Properties: Foyle, WA132

Energy Efficiency Certificates: Public Buildings, WA311

External Consultants: Guidelines, WA130

Fuel: DFP Spend, WA316

Fuel Smuggling, WA325

Funding: Cross-departmental Working, WA329

Government Assets, WA314–15

Gross Domestic Product, WA504–5

Human Resources, WA130

Job Losses: Construction Industry, WA133–4

Mortgage and Debt Arrears, WA134

Procurement and E-Procurement Systems, WA133

Properties

Rates Register, WA500

Unidentified Ownership, WA500

Public Works: Tender Process, WA316

Questions for Written Answer: Stationery Costs, WA134

Rates Bills, WA129

Rating

Arrears, WA505–6, WA507–8

Non-domestic System, WA504

Vacant Industrial/Non-domestic Properties, WA500–1

Rating Valuations: Town Centres, WA315

'Rebalancing the Northern Ireland Economy', WA503

Recruitment Agencies: DFP Spend, WA311

Renewable Energy: Stormont Estate, WA499

Research and Development

Industry Spend, WA328

Percentage of GDP, WA328–9

Top 20 Investors, WA328

Small Business Rate Relief Scheme, WA130, WA325

Social Clauses

Government Contracts, WA331

Job Creation, WA498–9

Stormont Estate: Entrance Security, WA316–17

Suicide

Deaths from 2001 to 2011, WA317–21

North Down, WA327–8

Trade Union Duties, WA128

UK Credit Rating, WA330

Unemployment

2001 to 2011, WA321–3

Belfast/Armagh/Derry, WA131

Long-term Estimates, WA324–5

Unemployment: Holywood Electoral Area, WA314

Welfare Reform, WA132

Youth Contract, WA329

Journal of Proceedings

Minutes of Proceedings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 20 February 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 Ms Paula Bradley replace Mr Gregory Campbell as a member of the Committee for Social Development; and that Mr Gregory Campbell replace Ms Paula Bradley as a member of the Committee for the Environment.

Mr P Weir

Lord Morrow

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3. Speaker's Business

3.1 Public Petition - Save Drumcree College, Portadown

Mrs Dolores Kelly was granted leave, in accordance with Standing Order 22, to present a Public Petition relating to Saving Drumcree College, Portadown.

4. Executive Committee Business

4.1 Consideration Stage - Budget Bill (NIA Bill 4/11-15)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson, moved the Consideration Stage of the Budget Bill.

No amendments were tabled to the Bill.

Clauses

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clauses 1 to 7 stand part of the Bill.

Schedules

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Schedules 1 to 4 stand part of the Bill.

Long Title

The question being put, the Long Title was **agreed** without division.

Bill NIA 4/11-15 stood referred to the Speaker.

4.2 Motion - Social Security (Loss of Benefit) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011

Proposed:

That the Social Security (Loss of Benefit) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 be approved.

Minister for Social Development

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

5. Private Members' Business

5.1 Motion - Emergency Life Support Skills

Proposed:

That this Assembly is concerned that heart and circulatory disease remains Northern Ireland's biggest killer; notes that for every minute that passes after a cardiac arrest without defibrillation, the chance of survival is reduced by around 10 per cent, but that immediate cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) can improve the chances of survival by up to a factor of three; further notes that, last year, more than 30,000 people were trained in Emergency Life Support Skills (ELS), including CPR, by the British Heart Foundation's (BHF) Heartstart Programme; supports BHF's campaign to ensure that all schools, communities, and workplaces, provide ELS training; and calls on the Executive, the Health and Social Care Trusts and the education bodies to work together to provide the necessary investment to deliver this training to every school, community and workplace.

Mr P Weir

Mr K McCarthy

Mr J McCallister

Ms M Gildernew

Mr M Durkan

Debate ensued.

The Principal deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

5.2 Motion - Welfare Reform

Proposed:

That this Assembly believes that the Coalition Government's welfare cuts and major aspects of its Welfare Reform agenda are having, and will continue to have, a significant detrimental impact on our community; recognises that the impact will be more severe for Northern Ireland given our historically high levels of disadvantage, and our higher proportions of families with children and people in receipt of Disability Living Allowance; notes that the accumulated cost of welfare cuts to the local economy could reach £450m; and calls on the Executive to make opposition to a wide range of the welfare reforms its highest priority, and to immediately pursue robust negotiations with the Coalition Government to pursue all possible legal and operational flexibilities and financial support to mitigate the impact of the welfare cuts and changes imposed on Northern Ireland.

Mr M Durkan

Dr A McDonnell

Ms M Ritchie

Mrs D Kelly

5.3 Amendment No.1

Proposed:

Leave out all after "Assembly" and insert:

' reaffirms its unanimous support for welfare reforms that are aimed at simplifying the social security process and helping people to get back to work; notes with concern the negative impact that many of the Coalition Government's proposed welfare reforms could have on vulnerable people in Northern Ireland; and calls on the Minister for Social Development to continue his robust engagement with the Coalition Government and to work with Executive colleagues via the Executive Sub-Group on Welfare Reform to pursue, where possible, measures to mitigate the negative impacts of the proposed welfare reforms on Northern Ireland'

Mr S Hamilton

Mr S Douglas

Mr A Easton

Ms P Lewis

5.4 Amendment No. 2

Proposed:

After 'impact on our community' insert:

'and, given the British Government's record of rejecting all proposed changes, even those championed by its own Second Chamber, calls on all parties to defend the objectives of the Programme for Government and use the powers of this institution to protect our most vulnerable citizens'

Mr A Maskey

Mr M Brady

Mr F McCann

Debate ensued.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

6. Question Time

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

6.1 Culture, Arts and Leisure

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Ms Carál Ní Chuilín.

6.2 Education

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd.

7. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

7.1 Motion - Welfare Reform (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

Amendment No. 1 being put, the Amendment **fell** (Division 1).

Amendment No. 2 being put, the Amendment **fell** (Division 2).

The Question being put, the Motion was **negatived** (Division 3).

8. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.18pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

20 February 2012

Northern Ireland Assembly

20 February 2012
Division 1

Welfare Reform - Amendment 1

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'Assembly' and insert:

' reaffirms its unanimous support for welfare reforms that are aimed at simplifying the social security process and helping people to get back to work; notes with concern the negative impact that many of the Coalition Government's proposed welfare reforms could have on vulnerable people in Northern Ireland; and calls on the Minister for Social Development to continue his robust engagement with the Coalition Government and to work with Executive colleagues via the Executive Sub-Group on Welfare Reform to pursue, where possible, measures to mitigate the negative impacts of the proposed welfare reforms on Northern Ireland'

Mr S Hamilton

Mr S Douglas

Mr A Easton

Ms P Lewis

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 44

Noes: 44

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Beggs, Ms P Bradley, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Douglas and Mr G Robinson.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Ms M Anderson, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Mr Doherty, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Byrne and Mrs McKeivitt.

The Amendment **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

20 February 2012
Division 2

Welfare Reform - Amendment 2

Proposed:

After 'impact on our community' insert:

'and, given the British Government's record of rejecting all proposed changes, even those championed by its own Second Chamber, calls on all parties to defend the objectives of the Programme for Government and use the powers of this institution to protect our most vulnerable citizens'

Mr A Maskey

Mr M Brady

Mr F McCann

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 44

Noes: 45

AYES

Ms M Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Mr Doherty, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Brady and Mr A Maskey.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Beggs, Ms P Bradley, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Douglas and Mr G Robinson.

The Amendment **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

20 February 2012
Division 3

Welfare Reform - Motion

Proposed:

That this Assembly believes that the Coalition Government's welfare cuts and major aspects of its Welfare Reform agenda are having, and will continue to have, a significant detrimental impact on our community; recognises that the impact will be more severe for Northern Ireland given our historically high levels of disadvantage, and our higher proportions of families with children and people in receipt of Disability Living Allowance; notes that the accumulated cost of welfare cuts to the local economy could reach £450m; and calls on the Executive to make opposition to a wide range of the welfare reforms its highest priority, and to immediately pursue robust negotiations with the Coalition Government to pursue all possible legal and operational flexibilities and financial support to mitigate the impact of the welfare cuts and changes imposed on Northern Ireland.

*Mr M Durkan
Dr A McDonnell
Ms M Ritchie
Mrs D Kelly*

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 38

Noes: 44

AYES

Mr Agnew, Ms M Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mr Doherty, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Byrne and Mrs McKeivitt.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Beggs, Ms P Bradley, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Douglas and Mr G Robinson.

The Motion was **negatived**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 15 - 20 February 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
 - CITB – ConstructionSkills Northern Ireland Annual Report 2010/2011 (DEL)
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules

(The Department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

 - S.R. 2012/42 The Health and Personal Social Services (Superannuation Scheme, Injury Benefits and Additional Voluntary Contributions), Health and Social Care (Pension Scheme) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DHSSPS)
 - S.R. 2012/43 The Old Church Road, Newtownabbey (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
 - S.R. 2012/46 The Rates (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DFP)
 - S.R. 2012/47 The Rates (Microgeneration) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DFP)
 - Draft S.R. 2012/ The Welfare of Animals (Permitted Procedures by Lay Persons) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DARD)

For Information Only:

 - S.R. 2012/45 The Control of Traffic (Carrickfergus) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
 - Tuition Fees for Higher Education at Cafre and a Proposal to Introduce Differential Higher Tuition Fees for Students from GB (DARD)
9. Departmental Publications
 - Corporate Plan and Equality Plan 2011-2015 (The Consumer Council)
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 21 February 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 First Stage - Marine Bill (NIA Bill 5/11-15)

The Minister of the Environment, Mr Alex Attwood, introduced a Bill to provide for marine plans in relation to the Northern Ireland inshore region; to provide for marine conservation zones in that region; to make further provision in relation to marine licensing for certain electricity works in that region; and for connected purposes.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

2.2 Further Consideration Stage - Budget Bill (NIA Bill 4/11-15)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson, moved the Further Consideration Stage of the Budget Bill.

No amendments were tabled to the Bill.

Bill NIA 4/11-15 stood referred to the Speaker for consideration in accordance with section 10 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

2.3 Motion - The Official Statistics Order (Northern Ireland) 2012

Proposed:

That the Official Statistics Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 be affirmed.

Minister of Finance and Personnel

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3. Private Members' Business

3.1 Motion - Action Plan to Improve the Sustainability of Indigenous Fish Stocks

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes that a number of indigenous fish species, including salmon, are being exploited by both legal and illegal fishing to the point where stocks are no longer sustainable; calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in partnership with other relevant Departments, and following consultation with key stakeholders, to develop an action plan, which includes actions required by the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation, to improve the sustainability of relevant fish stocks in the forthcoming and subsequent seasons; and further calls on the Minister to work in partnership with all relevant stakeholders to deliver the action plan.

Mr R Swann

Mr D Kinahan

Mrs S Overend

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3.2 Motion - Organ Donation

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to undertake a review of organ donation.

Mr J Wells

Ms P Lewis

Mr G Dunne Ms P Bradley

3.3 Amendment

Proposed:

At end insert:

'which should consider all options for increasing organ donations and carrying out a clinical ethics consultation on the introduction of an opt-out scheme.'

Mr M Durkan

Mr P Ramsey

The sitting was suspended at 12.31 pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm with the Speaker in the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Questions were put to, and answered by, the deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness. Junior Minister, Ms Martina Anderson, also answered a number of questions.

4.2 Agriculture and Rural Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill.

5. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

Motion - Organ Donation

Debate resumed on the Motion.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Amendment was **made** without division.

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

6. Adjournment

Mr Phil Flanagan spoke to his topic on the provision of home help services in Co Fermanagh

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 4.38pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

21 February 2012

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 21 February 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
 - Belfast Health and Social Care Trust Charitable Trust Fund Annual Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2011 (DHSSPS)
 - Joint Review by RQIA and CJI of the Protocol for Joint Investigation of Alleged and Suspected Cases of Abuse of Vulnerable Adults (DOJ)
 - Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute Annual Report and Accounts 2010/2011 (DARD)
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules
 - S.R. 2012/59 The Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)
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 21 February 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
/Budget (No. 2) Bill NIA Bill 1/11-15	13.06.11	20.06.11	N/A	N/A	21.06.11	27.06.11	27.06.11	25.07.11
/Rates (Amendment) Bill NIA Bill 2/11-15	16.01.12	24.01.12	N/A	N/A	31.01.12	06.02.12	07.02.12	
Pensions Bill NIA Bill 3/11-15	23.01.12	31.01.12	13.03.12					
/Budget Bill NIA Bill 4/11-15	13.02.12	14.02.12	N/A	N/A	20.02.12	21.02.12		
Marine Bill NIA Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12							

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

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 27 February 2012

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Speaker's Business

The Speaker informed Members that he had received a letter from Ms Margaret Ritchie resigning as a Member of the Assembly with effect from 31 March 2012. The Speaker advised that he had notified the Chief Electoral Officer, in accordance with Section 35 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

3. Matter of the Day

3.1 Oscar Success of 'The Shore'

Mr Robin Swann made a statement, under Standing Order 24, in relation to the Oscar Success of 'The Shore'. Party representatives were also called to speak on the matter.

4. Executive Committee Business

4.1 Statement - North-South Ministerial Council meeting in Inland Waterways sectoral format

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Ms Carál Ní Chuilín, made a statement regarding the North-South Ministerial Council meeting in Inland Waterways sectoral format, following which she replied to questions.

4.2 Statement - North-South Ministerial Council meeting in Language Body sectoral format

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Ms Carál Ní Chuilín, made a statement regarding the North-South Ministerial Council meeting in Language Body sectoral format, following which she replied to questions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

5. Assembly Business

5.1 Motion - Committee Membership

Proposed:

That Mr Paul Givan replace Mr Robin Newton as a member of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

Mr P Weir

Lord Morrow

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

6. Executive Committee Business (Cont'd)

6.1 Final Stage - Budget Bill (NIA Bill 4/11-15)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson, moved that the Final Stage of the Budget Bill (NIA Bill 4/11-15) do now pass.

Debate ensued.

NIA Bill 4/11-15 passed Final Stage with cross-community support. *Nemine contradicente.*

7. Private Members' Business

7.1 Motion - Decade of Centenaries

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the number of centenaries of significant historic events affecting the UK and Ireland in the next ten years; calls on the Executive to ensure that these are marked in an inclusive manner; and further calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to work together, with the British and Irish Governments, to develop a coordinated approach to the commemoration of these important events in our shared history.

*Mr C Lyttle
Ms S Dickson
Ms A Lo
Mr T Lunn*

Debate ensued.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

The Speaker took the Chair.

8. Question Time

8.1 Employment and Learning

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Stephen Farry.

8.2 Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Mrs Arlene Foster.

9. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

9.1 Motion - Decade of Centenaries

Debate resumed on the motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

10. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 4.44pm.

Mr William Hay
The Speaker

27 February 2012

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 22 - 27 February 2012

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
 - Marine Bill (As Introduced) (NIA Bill 5/11-15)
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
 - Land and Property Services Trust Statement - Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2011 (DFP)
5. Assembly Reports
 - Response to the Consultation on the Draft Programme for Government 2011-15, the Draft Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2011-21 and the Draft Economic Strategy NIA 33/11-15 (Committee for Regional Development)
6. Statutory Rules
 - S.R. 2012/49 Superannuation (Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DFP)
 - S.R. 2012/50 Superannuation (Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DFP)
 - S.R. 2012/51 Superannuation (Commissioner of the Northern Ireland Law Commission) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DFP)
 - S.R. 2012/52 The Removal and Disposal of Vehicles (Prescribed Periods) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)
 - S.R. 2012/57 The University Terrace, Belfast (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
 - S.R. 2012/58 The Shankbridge Road, Ballymena (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
 - S.R. 2012/60 The Malone Beeches, Belfast (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
 - S.R. 2012/61 The Statutory Nuisances (Appeals) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)

For Information Only:

 - S.R. 2012/48 (C.8) Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) (2011 Act) (Commencement No.3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
 - S.R. 2012/53 The Waiting Restrictions (Ormeau Road, Belfast) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
 - S.R. 2012/54 The Cycle Routes (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
 - S.R. 2012/55 The Bus Lanes (East Bridge Street and Cromac Street, Belfast) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
 - S.R. 2012/56 The Parking Places (Disabled Persons' Vehicles) (Amendment No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
 - S.R. 2012/63 The Prohibition of Traffic (Lenadoon, Belfast) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)

7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 28 February 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 Motion - To Continue Operation of the Department of Justice from 1 May 2012

Proposed:

That, pursuant to paragraph 8(1) of Schedule 1 to the Northern Ireland Act 2009, the Department of Justice established by the Department of Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 is to continue operating from 1 May 2012.

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

2.2 Amendment

Proposed:

Leave out all after '2009,' and insert:

'a second Act of the Assembly, which results in the Minister of Justice being appointed by d'Hondt, is brought forward to ensure that the Department of Justice is to continue operating from 1 May 2012.'

Mr A Maginness

Dr A McDonnell

Mr C McDevitt

Mr C Eastwood

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Amendment **fell** (Division 1).

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support (Division 2).

The sitting was suspended at 12.29pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm with the Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) in the Chair.

3. Question Time

3.1 Environment

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of the Environment, Mr Alex Attwood.

3.2 Finance and Personnel

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson.

4. Executive Committee Business (Cont'd)

4.1 Royal Assent

The Speaker informed Members that Royal Assent had been signified on 28 February 2012 to the Rates Amendment Act (Northern Ireland) 2012.

4.2 Statement - Management of Article 31 Planning Applications and Article 31 Planning Decisions

The Minister of the Environment, Mr Alex Attwood, made a statement regarding the Management of Article 31 Planning Applications and Article 31 Planning Decisions, following which he replied to questions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

5. Private Members' Business

5.1 Motion - Car-jacking Crimes

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Justice to respond to public concerns about the recent pattern of car-jackings, particularly in relation to the role of prolific offenders and the conditions on which they are given bail; and further calls on the Minister to develop and resource a strategy to curb this crime and engender public confidence.

*Mr P Maskey
Mr P Sheehan
Ms J McCann*

5.2 Amendment

Proposed:

At end insert:

' , including introducing tougher sentences.'

*Mr P Weir
Mr D McIlveen
Mr J Craig
Mr J Wells*

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Amendment was **made** without division.

The Question being put, the Motion as amended, was **carried** without division.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

5.3 Motion - Securing Undeveloped Sites

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes that there are a number of sites in urban areas where buildings, or other structures, have been demolished or removed pending future development, and that neither local councils nor the Health and Safety Executive have the power to require that they are made secure; and calls on the Minister of the Environment to bring forward proposals to empower local councils to require that sites, which contain no existing buildings or structures and are awaiting development, be made secure.

*Miss M McIlveen
Mr P Weir*

5.4 Amendment**Proposed:**

Leave out all after the second 'to require that' and insert:

'incomplete sites and derelict buildings be made secure.'

Mr D Kinahan
Mrs S Overend

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Amendment was **made** without division.

The Question being put, the Motion as amended, was **carried** without division.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

6. Adjournment

Mrs Judith Cochrane spoke to her topic on support for children and young people with cancer in East Belfast.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 7.19pm.

Mr William Hay
The Speaker

28 February 2012

Northern Ireland Assembly

28 February 2012
Divisions

Division No. 1

To Continue Operation of the Department of Justice from 1 May 2012 - Amendment

Proposed:

Leave out all after '2009,' and insert:

'a second Act of the Assembly, which results in the Minister of Justice being appointed by d'Hondt, is brought forward to ensure that the Department of Justice is to continue operating from 1 May 2012.'

Mr A Maginness
Dr A McDonnell
Mr C McDevitt
Mr C Eastwood

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 13
Noes: 78

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mrs McKevitt, Mr A Maginness, Mr P Ramsey, Ms Ritchie.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Byrne and Mr Eastwood.

NOES

Ms M Anderson, Mr S Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr W Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lewis, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Mr P Maskey, Mr Molloy, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Murphy, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Sheehan, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr W Clarke and Mr G Robinson.

The following Member voted in both Lobbies and is therefore not counted in the result: Mr Allister.

The Amendment **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

28 February 2012

Divisions

Division No. 2

To Continue Operation of the Department of Justice from 1 May 2012 - Motion

Proposed:

That, pursuant to paragraph 8(1) of Schedule 1 to the Northern Ireland Act 2009, the Department of Justice established by the Department of Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 is to continue operating from 1 May 2012.

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 78

Noes: 13

AYES

Nationalist:

Ms M Anderson, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Mr W Clarke, Mr Flanagan, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr Mzz McGuinness, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr P Maskey, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Sheehan.

Unionist:

Mr S Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lewis, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Other:

Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr W Clarke and Mr G Robinson.

NOES

Nationalist:

Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr A Maginness, Mr P Ramsey.

Unionist:

Mr Allister.

Other:

Mr Agnew

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Eastwood and Mrs McKeivitt.

Total votes	91	Total Ayes	78	[85.7%%]
Nationalist Votes	34	Nationalist Ayes	23	[67.6%%]
Unionist Votes	48	Unionist Ayes	47	[97.9%%]
Other Votes	9	Other Ayes	8	[88.9%%]

The Motion was **carried** (cross-community vote).

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 28 February 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
 - Charitable Donations and Bequests Annual Report to 31/03/2011 (DSD)
 - Northern Ireland Central Investment Fund for Charities Annual Report to 30/09/2011 (DSD)
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules
 - S.R. 2012/62 The Education (Student Support) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009 (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DEL)
 - S.R. 2012/64 Police Service of Northern Ireland Pensions (Amendment) Regulations 2012 (DOJ)
 - S.R. 2012/70 The Westbourne Avenue, Ballymena (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly Legislation:

Stages in Consideration of Public Bills

First Stage: Introduction of Bill.

Second Stage: General debate of the Bill with an opportunity for Members to vote on its general principles.

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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 28 February 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
/Budget (No. 2) Bill NIA Bill 1/11-15	13.06.11	20.06.11	N/A	N/A	21.06.11	27.06.11	27.06.11	25.07.11
/Rates (Amendment) Bill NIA Bill 2/11-15	16.01.12	24.01.12	N/A	N/A	31.01.12	06.02.12	07.02.12	28.02.12
Pensions Bill NIA Bill 3/11-15	23.01.12	31.01.12	13.03.12					
/Budget Bill NIA Bill 4/11-15	13.02.12	14.02.12	N/A	N/A	20.02.12	21.02.12	27.02.12	
Marine Bill NIA Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12							

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

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 5 March 2012

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Matter of the Day

2.1 **Rory McIlroy Becoming World Number One Golfer**

Mr Mike Nesbitt made a statement, under Standing Order 24, in relation to Rory McIlroy becoming world number one golfer. Party representatives were also called to speak on the matter.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 **Statement - North-South Ministerial Council meeting in Agriculture sectoral format**

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill, made a statement regarding the North-South Ministerial Council meeting in Agriculture sectoral format, following which she replied to questions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

3.2 **Second Stage - Marine Bill (NIA Bill 5/11-15)**

The Minister of the Environment, Mr Alex Attwood, moved the Second Stage of the Marine Bill (NIA Bill 5/11-15).

Debate ensued.

The Speaker took the Chair.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

4. Question Time

4.1 **Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister**

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Rt Hon Peter Robinson. The Junior Minister, Mr Jonathan Bell, also answered a number of questions.

4.2 **Health, Social Services and Public Safety**

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots.

5. Executive Committee Business (Cont'd)

5.1 **Second Stage - Marine Bill (NIA Bill 5/11-15) (Cont'd)**

Debate resumed on the Motion.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

Bill (NIA 5/11-15) passed Second Stage

5.2 Motion - Draft High Hedges (Fee Transfer) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012**Proposed:**

That the draft High Hedges (Fee Transfer) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.

Minister of the Environment

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

5.3 Motion - Public Bodies (Abolition of the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts) Order 2012**Proposed:**

That this Assembly consents to the Public Bodies (Abolition of the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts) Order 2012 in the form of the draft laid before the UK Parliament on 19 January 2012.

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

6. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.57pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

5 March 2012

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 29 February - 5 March 2012

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

- Rates (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2012

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

- Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment Mineral Development Account for the year ended 31 March 2011 (NIAO)
- Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment Petroleum Production Account for the year ended 31 March 2011 (NIAO)
- Department for Employment and Learning Disposal and Retention Schedule (DCAL)

5. Assembly Reports

6. Statutory Rules

- S.R. 2012/65 The Aujeszky's Disease Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DARD)
- S.R. 2012/66 Aujeszky's Disease Scheme Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DARD)
- S.R. 2012/73 The Travelling Expenses and Remission of Charges (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DHSSPS)
- S.R. 2012/79 The Rates (Social Sector Value) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DFP)
- S.R. 2012/83 The Mesothelioma Lump Sum Payment (Conditions and Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
- S.R. 2012/84 The Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
- S.R. 2012/85 Local Government (Payments to Councillors) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)
- Draft S.R. 2012 The Rates (Deferment) (Revocation and Savings) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DFP)

For Information Only:

- S.R. 2012/67 The Pigs (Records, Identification and Movement) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DARD)
- S.R. 2012/69 The Parking Places on Roads (Kilkeel) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
- S.R. 2012/75 The Loading Bays on Roads (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
- S.R. 2012/76 The Prohibition of Traffic (Lower Windsor, Belfast) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
- S.R. 2012/80 The Parking Places and Loading Bays on Roads (Londonderry) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
- S.R. 2012/81 The Employment Rights (Increase of Limits) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DEL)

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

- Consultation on Proposed Increases to Contributions for Members of the NI Teachers' Pension Scheme (NITPS) - Department of Education response (DE)

9. Departmental Publications

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 6 March 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 - 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, following which he replied to questions.

2.2 Statement - Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland and the Launch of the Associated Employer Engagement Plan

The Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Stephen Farry, made a statement regarding the Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland and the Launch of the Associated Employer Engagement Plan, following which he replied to questions.

2.3 Motion - The Draft Labour Relations Agency Code of Practice on Time Off for Trade Union Duties and Activities

Proposed:

That the Draft Labour Relations Agency Code of Practice on Time Off for Trade Union Duties and Activities be approved.

Minister for Employment and Learning

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3. Private Members' Business

3.1 Motion - Educational Assistance for Young People

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the good work being done by Further Education Colleges as well as schools; and calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to establish a working group, comprising officials from the Department for Social Development, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the South Eastern Regional College and the PSNI to identify ways of improving access to further education for young people experiencing health, social and housing problems by addressing any barriers that exist in these areas.

*Mr A Easton
Mr R Newton
Mr S Douglas
Mr J Craig*

3.2 Amendment

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'working group,' and insert:

'as part of a wider delivery mechanism to support the forthcoming Executive strategy for young people not in employment, education or training, comprising officials from the Department for Social Development, the Department

of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, all Further Educational Colleges and the PSNI, to identify ways of improving access to further education for young people experiencing a range of personal and social barriers.'

*Mr C Lyttle
Mr T Lunn
Ms A Lo*

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 12.29pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) in the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 Justice

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford.

4.2 Regional Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy.

5. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

5.1 Motion - Educational Assistance for Young People (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the Motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Amendment was **made** without division.

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

5.2 Motion - Fairtrade Fortnight

Proposed:

That this Assembly acknowledges 'Fairtrade Fortnight'; notes the adoption of fairtrade procurement policies by many branches of local and central government; and calls on the Executive to review fairtrade procurement policy with a view to supporting fairtrade when and where possible.

*Mr C McDevitt
Mr J Wells
Mr S Dickson
Ms J McCann
Mr R Swann*

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

6. Adjournment

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

Mr Danny Kinahan spoke to his topic on plans for Parkgate Quarry, County Antrim

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.55pm.

**Mr William Hay
The Speaker**

6 March 2012

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 6 March 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
 - S.R. 2012/71 The Firefighters' Pension Scheme (Contributions) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DHSSPS)
 - S.R. 2012/72 The New Firefighters' Pension Scheme (Contributions) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DHSSPS)
 - S.R. 2012/95 The Foyle Area (Greenbraes Fishery Angling Permits) Regulations 2012 (DARD)
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
 - Consultation on draft Northern Ireland Marine Position Paper (DOE)
9. Departmental Publications
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly Legislation:

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Final Stage: Passing or rejecting of Bill by the Assembly, without further amendment.

Royal Assent.

Proceedings as at 6 March 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
/Budget (No. 2) Bill NIA Bill 1/11-15	13.06.11	20.06.11	N/A	N/A	21.06.11	27.06.11	27.06.11	25.07.11
/Rates (Amendment) Bill NIA Bill 2/11-15	16.01.12	24.01.12	N/A	N/A	31.01.12	06.02.12	07.02.12	28.02.12
Pensions Bill NIA Bill 3/11-15	23.01.12	31.01.12	13.03.12					
/Budget Bill NIA Bill 4/11-15	13.02.12	14.02.12	N/A	N/A	20.02.12	21.02.12	27.02.12	
Marine Bill NIA Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	19.04.12					

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

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage